











# THE SPOTTED PANTHER







*"Nao moved out upon a huge platform of rock and we watched the Dyak wave the torch above his head."*

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## THE SPOTTED PANTHER

BY

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"The White Waterfall"

"Bust of Lincoln"

Etc.

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TO  
MY BROTHER  
JACK





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# THE SPOTTED PANTHER



## CHAPTER I.

### THE HOUSE OF THE DREAM SMOKE

**T**O THE man who thinks that the United States of America is the milk and honey section of the world, and that New York is the centre of that section, there is no news that could be more distressing than the knowledge that he is as far away from that centre as he can possibly get. Chico Morgan made this discovery on the summer evening that he worked out the geographical position of Banjermassin. Broadway was as far to the east as it was to the west, and Chico cursed softly as the home-longing produced by the discovery bit into his soul.

“Just think,” he growled, “we’ve got the soles of our shoes directly opposite the soles of the shoes worn by the fellows who are tramping up and down the White Way, and what is more, we haven’t got the money to get one step nearer home.”

Chico’s statement was the plain truth. New York was on the opposite side of the world, and we were financially incapable of lessening the intervening

distance by a single league. Up before our mental eyes came pictures of miles of electric-lighted streets with whining trolley cars and goblin-eyed automobiles, and Morgan thoughtfully doused the slush lamp lest one of us might notice the suspicious moisture in the eyes of the other. There is no hunger like the home-hunger.

After a long silence, Chico spoke. "Let's take a walk around," he said. "This room is like a furnace."

We stumbled down the rickety stairs and out into the narrow street that appeared to be crammed full of the real extract of gloom. The occasional lamp that blinked fearfully at a corner seemed to fight for existence against the encompassing darkness, and the houses were blotted out with the thick blanket of the tropical night. Upon the little puffs of air that came prowling up the Banjer from the Java Sea were all the odours of the East. Smells of spices, of wet earth, bean-oil, marigolds, incense, and burning punk came to our nostrils, and we longed with the longing of the exile for the clean sweet smells of the home country that was so far away.

There is a curious sense of expectancy in a tropic night. The earth seems to be in a state of fever, and one waits for a change with the anxiety of a nurse at the bedside of a patient. And that peculiar feeling

went with Chico Morgan and me on that night through the streets of the old Dutch town of Banjermassin. The dark, crooked streets were the abodes of mystery, and the whispers that came from stoops and passageways where a mixed population gasped in various stages of *déshabille*, stirred us strangely as we walked along.

"When I get back," stammered Chico, addressing a row of tamarind trees that lined the street, "I'll never stray farther than Fort George or Coney! Honest! I won't! These leagues of space that lie between us and the Battery make me feel as if I had been sandbagged every time I think of them."

"You'll stay about three weeks," I suggested. "Three weeks or less."

"I'll stay the rest of my life!" he roared indignantly. "I'll never ——"

We stopped and pushed our heads forward. From a little dark alley came the faint sounds of a phonograph, and we listened eagerly. The instrument was sending into the spice-scented air of Banjermassin a tune that set our blood tingling.

"Great Scott!" growled Chico. "Do you hear that?"

"Of course I hear it!" I answered. "Some Dutchman has got a bunch of American records, and

he's entertaining his friends with the 'Star Spangled Banner.' "

"We'll call on him," said Morgan. "It's possible — barely possible — that we might find a millionaire from Newport who has a yacht tied up somewhere in the harbour."

Chico turned into the dark alleyway, and I followed without protest. The search for the phonograph and its owner would take our thoughts for the time being from the contemplation of the films of home scenes which memory unwound, and that was something to be thankful for. Besides, it was barely possible that we would find a countryman, not a millionaire, as Morgan suggested, but some recruit of the American legion of devil-may-care that sits upon the rim of the earth and whose members look toward God's Country with the same reverence that the good Mahommedan looks toward the Kaaba of Mecca.

The phonograph had stopped playing before we had taken ten paces down the alley, but through the shutters of a shack, at the extreme end of the passage, rays of light shot out into the night like the white spears of crusaders, and Chico Morgan and I silently approached the apertures through which the light was streaming. The East breeds curiosity, and we had no compunction about playing the part of Peep-



ing Toms in our endeavour to find out who owned the phonograph whose squeaky voice annihilated space.

The room into which we looked was an opium den of the lowest kind. Chinese, Dyaks, Javanese, and filthy Hindus sprawled upon the plaited fibre mats that were spread upon the floor, while immediately beneath our peepholes, and so close that we could have touched him with our hands if the spyholes had been large enough to insert our arms, lay a white man.

There was no mistake about his colour. The attendant Mongolian had just prepared his "pill," and the light from the little brass lamp fell full upon his face. It was fearfully emaciated, the skin hanging loosely upon the bones, while the long, lean hands that clutched at the pipe appeared to be semi-transparent as he waved them between us and the flickering flame.

For a full minute we had an undisturbed view of the place. The small cheap phonograph stood on a raised dais at the far end of the room, and upon this dais sat the Mongolian proprietor of the outfit. The smokers were silent, except for the occasional muttering of a drugged dreamer, but while we peeped through the chinks in the matchwood and attap walls, the dead silence of the place was shattered in

a startling manner. A wild roar came from a curtained opening at the rear of the dais, and next instant the curtain was torn aside, and a whirling mass of fighting men was flung into the big room. For a moment we could see nothing but flying legs and arms, then our startled eyes gripped the meaning of the tornado. A red-headed white man of tremendous proportions, possessing the limbs of a Greek god and the fighting face of a Viking, was battling his way up the room, and hanging to him like wolves to a buffalo were a dozen screaming Chinamen and Malays!

Chico Morgan smothered an exclamation and pressed his face close to the observation hole. A fight always interested Chico, and it was a battle royal that we were looking at just then. That red-headed man tossed the brown and yellow vermin in all directions as he fought his way toward the mat where the emaciated white man fumbled with his opium pipe. My! wasn't he a fighter! That place was a warren that belched forth assailants at the command of the fat Mongolian upon the dais, but Redhead towered above them like a battleship above a swarm of pirate junks. I thrilled as I watched him. He was a mighty man. The arms he swung were such as Ajax might have envied, and each time one of his tremendous fists crashed against the

head of a nigger, there was one assailant less in that place of smells and deviltry. Right and left those screaming natives got the sledgehammer blows, and the giant with the red head roared defiance at them. He was a glorious fighter.

"Jumping jigsaws!" I cried. "Did you ever see such a man?"

Chico Morgan did not reply to my question, and when I turned to search for him he was gone. I jumped back to the spyhole and looked. Chico had forgotten Broadway. He had his big back to the back of Redhead, and they were fighting like the Seven Devils that guard the one door of escape that leads from the Malayan hell!

I am treasuring within my mind the memory pictures of that battle so that I may warm my blood with them in the winter of my old age. It was a fight that Homer would have put into jewelled phrases. There were never two gladiators like Chico Morgan and Redhead, and they swept up that room like a tornado, sending Malays, Chinese, and greasy Hindus sprawling backward from their punches.

The white man on the bench immediately beneath my spyhole stared at the battle with opium-dulled eyes. Although he was only a few feet from the hole through which I watched the fight, the screams

of the natives prevented him from hearing the insane yells of encouragement I shouted through the aperture. I must confess that I had no desire to join in the fray at that moment, and I am unable to give a reason. The manner in which those two were disposing of their foes fascinated me to such an extent that I could not move from the spot where I was standing.

The pair of giants reached the white opium-smoker, the mob still attacking, but now somewhat wary of the four fists that smote like the hammer of Thor whenever a body came within hitting distance. The fat Mongolian proprietor was shrieking protestations against the invasion and endeavouring to urge his henchmen to the attack, but the half-naked retainers were none too anxious to clinch with the fighting pair.

"Come on!" roared Chico. "Come on, you yellow scum! I'd fight a million of you!"

Redhead glanced at Morgan, smiled like a big boy, then stooping swiftly, he put his arms around the emaciated white man with the opium pipe, and with a laughing cry to Chico he turned to fight his way back to the door.

I came to life at that moment. Racing round the shack, I dashed through the door and down the long room, shrieking to Redhead as I ran. He under-

stood at once that I was a friend. Very tenderly he passed me the thin form of the opium smoker, and then with Chico upon one side and Redhead upon the other we dashed for the door.

"Pound them!" roared Morgan.

"Straight punches!" shouted Redhead. "We've got them scared!"

Now as I write this narrative I am wondering which of those two, Chico or Redhead, was the greatest fighter, and as I look back upon that fight in the opium den, and the other fights when they battled against greater odds than they faced at their first meeting, I am in doubt as to which was the better man. I know well that Chico Morgan would never admit defeat, but when I tell of the prowess of the red-headed man we met that evening at Banjer-massin, the person who reads this narrative will understand that the two were the kind of men who would have led their tribes to battle in the days when the world was young. When we forget how to fight we will be on our way back to the jellyfish state that we emerged from five million years ago. Aggressiveness is life itself. The men who are fearless are big men, and the good Lord never made two bigger men than the two who battled back to back in the filthy opium den by the banks of the Banjer.

As we neared the door a naked Kling sprang for-



ward, a short knife lifted high in his muscular hand. His evident intention was to drive the broad blade into the thin white man we were endeavouring to take from the place, but Chico Morgan thwarted the intention. The Kling received Chico's big fist upon the jaw, and he was lifted clean off his feet and hurled against the matchboard walls with a force that shook the shack. Redhead unloosed a grim chuckle, but as he laughed, the fat proprietor of the place hurled a small teakwood table at the hanging lamp, and the wild mêlée was blotted out by the darkness.

It was at that critical moment that the opium smoker came out of his stupor. "This way, Lord Edwin!" he shouted, as he wriggled out of my arms. "This way!"

The thin one knew that place like a blind man knows his bedroom. Clinging to my arm and shrieking to Redhead, he reached the door while the mob rolled over us like a wave. I wrenched the Dutch lock from the thin boards, and with a head ringing from a blow with a mallet, I tumbled out into the cool night air.

"Chico!" I yelled. "Here, boy! This way!"

Morgan came through the opening with a rush that sent me sprawling, then the red-headed man battled through like a big hippopotamus, kicking viciously at a sinewy Chinaman who clung to his

right leg. Round the shack to the alley we raced together, Redhead and I supporting the smoker, while Chico discouraged the advance guard of the foe.

"Can you run, Phillip?" asked the big man, stooping over the rescued one.

"Run, Lord Edwin?" gasped the other. "No, I can't run! My running days are over. Clear out and leave me! You'll get into trouble for this business!"

Redhead ignored the advice by seizing the smoker around the waist, swinging him to his shoulder as if he were a child, and, with Chico and me at his heels, dashing into the soft night. A thousand odours floated upon the heavy air. Punk and incense, flower perfumes and the sour odours of mudbanks made strata through which we rushed madly, Redhead running with no apparent effort and paying no attention to the gurgled protests of the man upon his shoulders.

We zigzagged through narrow passages, splashed through wet places where the water from the river had swamped the track, and wriggled knee-deep in mud through a mire that threatened to engulf us. Once we stopped for an instant and listened intently. From behind came the faint *plap-plap* of pursuing feet, and the big man cursed softly as he made a movement to lower his burden. Chico understood

that movement. He slipped back into the darkness, and after a short interval there came to our ears a yelp of pain, the quickened patter of bare feet in hot retreat, then Morgan's returning footsteps.

"All right," he muttered. "It was only a Chinaman. Here, let me lend you a hand to carry your friend."

"No, no," said Redhead. "He's no weight at all. He's light."

"Light?" chuckled the smoker. "Of course I'm light! Hee, hee! I'm all smoke! All smoke!"

Redhead muttered something beneath his breath, and we ran on. On and on we went, through the waiting night, through the dark passageways, and as we ran we forgot Broadway with its whining trolley cars and goblin-eyed autos of which we had been dreaming an hour before.



## CHAPTER II

### THE WONDER CHALICE

IT WAS the opium smoker who called a halt. Slipping from the shoulder of Redhead, he opened a wooden door in a wall that was thickly covered with wistaria and Bougainvillea, and we followed him into the inclosure.

"This way," he murmured. "Keep close to me."

With Redhead supporting him, he stumbled along narrow pathways bordered with tropical flowers whose sweet odours half intoxicated us. It was a place that naiads and dryads might choose for a romping ground, and the silvery tinkle of fountains came to our ears with the drowsy murmur of wood doves that our steps disturbed.

"Steady," muttered the opium smoker. "There are steps here."

Chico Morgan and I followed up the half dozen steps, and found ourselves upon the piazza of a bungalow that was completely hidden by the luxuriant tropical growth. And at that moment, just as we considered the adventure at an end as far as we

were concerned, the red-headed man thought it an opportune time to introduce himself.

"My name is Edwin Templeton," he said quietly. "I'm ——"

"Lord Edwin Templeton," corrected the opium smoker, as he fumbled with a key. "Lord Edwin Templeton, I say!"

"There are no titles where you and I are concerned," said the big man, gripping Chico's hand. "You fight too well for any fool prefixes to be between us. I'm plain Templeton, or Red, if you like a shorter word."

Chico Morgan laughed the easy, unabashed laugh of the carefree man as he returned the grip. "I'm glad there's no title," he said quietly. "We're not in the habit of using them much out our way. My name is Chico Morgan, and this is my mate, Jack Lenford."

"Americans?" asked Templeton.

"Sure," answered Chico; then, as if the question brought back the attack of homesickness, he added: "And mighty sorry that we're so far away from the home country."

The opium smoker, still protesting against the omission of Templeton's title, had managed to unlock the door, and Redhead motioned us to enter the wide hall of the bungalow. But Chico Morgan

demurred. The fight being over, and all danger of pursuit out of the question, he had no further interest in the proceedings, and he attempted to excuse himself.

But the Englishman had no thought of letting Morgan escape so easily. He gripped Chico's arm as we attempted to back away, and his heavy voice boomed through the night.

"Do you think I could have fought my way out of that place without your help?" he cried. "Here! stop! Have you got any engagements?"

"None," answered Chico. "We came down from Singapore in *The Light of Asia*, jumped her here because he had a difference with the mate, and now we're watching the horizon to grab the first opportunity that will bring us within range of Sandy Hook."

Templeton gave a gurgle of joy, and his grip tightened. "I can put you next to the opportunity," he cried. "Come inside. I want a man or two, and by the Toe of Buddha! you're going to fill one of the jobs."

He half dragged Chico into the hall of the bungalow, and I followed. The place was lighted by a hanging lamp of hammered silver, and the soft light fell upon Chinese embroideries that covered the walls. Ebony settees curiously inlaid with mother-

of-pearl stood upon each side, while the curtain that separated the hall from the room which the opium smoker had entered bore a representation of Buddha sitting beneath a bo-tree, the whole piece outlined with Burmese spinels that sparkled in the lamplight.

The protesting high-pitched voice of the opium smoker came from the room as Templeton reached the curtain, and then our ears caught the sound of a woman's voice pleading with him like a mother pleads with her child. The Englishman entered the room with Chico and me at his heels, the look upon Morgan's face proving to me, if not to Templeton, that he had an inclination to bolt from the premises. Upon a couch at one side of the room was the opium smoker, and sitting beside him was a girl of wonderful beauty, whose white, shapely hand stroked the worn face of the *débauchée* at her side. Although the haggard face of the man was different from hers as one face could possibly be from another, yet the brows of the two, and the whimsical expression of the mouth, peculiar to both, proclaimed a relationship.

The girl rose quickly as Chico and I entered the room, and Templeton introduced us.

"These are two good Americans who helped me a little to-night, Evelyn," he explained. "Mr. Mor-

gan and Mr. Lenford, this is our friend's sister, Miss Courtney."

"And I'm Phillip Courtney," mumbled the man on the couch. "I always introduce myself. By George!" he cried, turning to Chico, "you're the greatest fighter, excepting Lord Edwin, that I ever saw! Absolutely the best!"

The girl touched a bell, and a Chinaman answered the summons. She instructed him to bring refreshments, and then excusing herself on account of the lateness of the hour, she left the room, leaving the four of us together. It was then that Chico and I had our first good look at Red Templeton. He sat under a lamp in the centre of the room, and the light fell full upon his remarkable face. It was an extraordinary face. The eyes were clear blue, full of a boyish innocence and brimming over with life and laughter, but the nose, jaw, and brow gave a strength and fighting quality to the face that told the observer that the laughter in the blue eyes was likely to disappear at any moment that the fighting devil beneath the surface announced that it was not the proper time for merriment. To me he appeared a superman on that evening, and the impression has never altered. A man too big for the petty conventions of the life he had been born to, he had thrown that life aside and had wooed adventure

where Romance flies her flag of gold on the rim of the earth. His was the true patent of nobility. He could earn his right to lead his people by the tremendous strength in the big arms and the hallmark of courage that one observed upon his face.

For about thirty minutes he plied Chico with questions concerning our wanderings, and while we conversed, the half stupefied Courtney lay upon the couch and muttered incoherently, interrupting occasionally with a question or remark that was totally irrelevant to the matter we were discussing.

"And you are open to an engagement?" asked Templeton, after Chico had finished a recital of our wanderings.

"I guess we are," answered Morgan. "This burg has little attraction for us."

Templeton surveyed Chico for a full minute, a half smile showing about his handsome mouth, then he stood up, walked toward a cabinet at the end of the room, unlocked it, took something from within, and started back to us. It is strange that every movement he made in approaching that cabinet and returning to his place beneath the lamp is etched upon my mind by the tremendous happening that immediately followed. The mind at moments of extraordinary stress is peculiarly sensitive to impressions, and I recall now how Templeton circled



outside the light of a silver sconce as he came back to us. He wished to produce the utmost effect, and he was successful. Arriving at his seat, that was immediately beneath the lamp, he flung back the flap of his coat that was concealing the object that he carried, and we saw!

Now on a summer night when the smell of wet earth or crushed flowers brings back to my mind that night in Banjermassin, I dream for hours of the glory that we saw. I shall dream of it till I die. Perhaps, like the Burman who asked that he might dream of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda after he reached the paradise of the faithful, I might dream of that for all eternity.

Chico and I thrust our heads forward when the big Englishman drew back his coat, and we gave a joint cry of wonder that roused Courtney from his stupor. Templeton's hands seemed to be holding a chalice that sent out white spears of light into the corners of the room, and we choked as we looked. There was never anything made like that. Never! It was the most glorious thing that has ever been created by the hand of man, and, while the world is a world, nothing will be made that will equal that.

Chico Morgan broke the little silence that followed the gurgle of wonder we emitted

when we caught the first glimpse of the thing. Chico stood up, made a movement toward Templeton, paused, and then stood with both hands extended.

"The Chalice!" he cried. "The Chalice of Everlasting Fire!"

Red Templeton laughed softly as he watched Morgan's face. The Englishman was pleased at the look of amazement that was upon Chico's sun-tanned countenance.

"You've guessed it," he said quietly. "It is the Chalice of Everlasting Fire!"

Body o' me! we had a curious feeling just then. It seemed as if we had waited all our lives to get a glimpse of that thing in the Englishman's hands. It was extraordinary what effect it had upon us. We seemed to drink the glory and the beauty of it through our eyes — drink it in to satisfy a longing that had asserted itself suddenly. It seemed as if our souls had been waiting for a glimpse of that wonder chalice, and that we had been in ignorance of that longing till the thing had been thrust suddenly before us. I suppose it was the stories of the vessel that had created the subconscious appetite. In the peculiar atmosphere of the Orient that chalice had lived upon the spice-scented breezes for centuries. Lived, mind you! In the fo'c'stle



of every blistered tramp that hooted off nipa-palm villages in search of cargo, the Chalice of Everlasting Fire was the subject of discussion. Men talked of it on the stinking Wusung, whispered of it at the pearl fisheries at Thursday Island, and dreamed of it as they looked upon the snows above Darjeeling. It had a dozen names. Dyak, Kling, Chinese, Jap, Tamil, Hindu, Shan, Khond, and Rajput knew it by a name of his own. It was *the Vessel of Flame*, *the Holy Cup*, *the Burning Pitcher*, *the Goblet of Life*, and a dozen other names, but English and American sailors and rovers spoke of it as the Chalice of Everlasting Fire. Somewhere in his notes on the Malay Archipelago, Markham has alluded to the legend as an Oriental counterpart of the story of the Holy Grail, and when we saw it that night in Banjermassin, we had no need to wonder how it had led its seekers to think of it as the miraculous cup of holy legend.

It was a high chalice of dull red gold, the gold that one sees in old coins of the East, and circling around it from the stem to the rim was a snake made of diamonds of extraordinary brilliancy and purity. That snake was alive! As we looked at it, the light reflected from one stone to another, seemed to run along the serpent like a tremor of sparkling fire, while the glorious stone set on the

rim exchanged stabs of light with its counterpart set in the very bottom of the cup. Mother o' me! it was well named! As we looked at it we knew why it had been woven into the chanties of the blunt-nosed tramps, the songs of the Malay pirates, and the nasal war hymns of the Dyaks. We wondered stupidly how any one could keep the whereabouts of the marvellous thing a secret.

It was Courtney, the opium fiend, who roused us from the torpor which the sight of the chalice had brought upon us. The half-crazy smoker lifted himself upon one elbow, glanced at the shining cup, then burst into a fit of hysterical laughter that echoed through the bungalow.

"Put it away, Lord Edwin!" he screamed. "Put it away! Take it out of my sight! It's mine, confound you! Don't leave it there or it will drive me crazy!"

Templeton pulled a screen between the couch and the table upon which the chalice rested, and Courtney became silent. Red sat down again and watched Chico. The white fire that seemed to be streaming continuously up the body of the snake prevented us from moving our eyes from the thing.

Presently Red leaned forward and put a question. "You know the story of it?" he asked.

Chico wet his lips, made an attempt to speak, failed, wet his lips again, and then whispered an answer.

"A part of it," he breathed.

It was peculiar how that vessel made one cautious about raising one's voice. I suppose all truly magnificent sights, such as a marvellous dawn, a wonderful sunset, a snow-capped mountain or a tremendous chasm have a quieting effect upon the beholder, and that chalice had the same effect upon us. We wished to observe it in complete silence, and Courtney's hysterical laughter had jarred us exceedingly.

Templeton pulled his chair closer and spoke to us in a low voice. "Do you know when it slipped out of the sight of white men?" he asked. "I mean the last time it was lost to the outside world."

"Over a hundred years ago, perhaps," answered Chico. "Is it more?"

Templeton laughed softly and stepped across to the teakwood table. Very tenderly he turned the chalice upside down and pointed to an inscription upon the bottom. The letters were graved roughly, but they were quite distinct, yet the words were unintelligible to us.

"It is Portuguese," said Templeton. "Shall I translate?"

Chico nodded his head, and Red translated. The inscription ran:

"To my king, Joam II, from  
Enrique de Gama, who is  
dying in the Sea of China."

"And who was King Joam II?" asked Morgan.

"The king of Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century," replied Red. "He was on the throne when the Portuguese started to send their old galleons around the world, and our friend, Enrique de Gama, wanted to send this little present to him when he was dying."

"And it never got there?"

"No; and it is the reason why it didn't get there that interests us at the present. After Enrique de Gama died, his sailors ran the ship ashore somewhere between here and the straits of Pulo Laut, and do you know what happened to those gentle mutineers?"

"The Lord only knows," murmured Chico.

"They were taken prisoners by the Kyans, the Orang Bukkit tribes, and the loot and the sailors were carried up into the hills."

"And — and," stammered Morgan, "who brought the chalice back here?"

Templeton pointed to the wreck upon the couch.

"He did," he answered. "At least he was one of the two that brought it back."

"And the other?"

"Is a Hindu. Courtney remembers very little of what happened to him from the time he got lost at the headwaters of the Barito, but Gung knows. I'll call him."

Templeton touched a gong, spoke to a Dyak servant who entered, and then flung a cloth over the chalice.

"Gung cannot look at it," he explained. "He knows its history. Enrique de Gama gathered the loot from a Buddhist temple in Kelantan, and only a holy man can look at this thing. Here he is."

A Hindu, tall and muscular looking, with a long scar extending obliquely from the bridge of the nose to the left jaw, entered the room with noiseless feet. His beady eyes wandered over the apartment, passed over Chico Morgan and myself, then, as if he sensed the chalice, he fixed his gaze upon the cloth which Templeton had thrown over it, bowed three times, and started to chant softly in Hindustanee.

Red put up his hand to silence him but Gung could not be silenced till he had made his invocation. When that was concluded he was the servant again and he stood erect waiting for orders.

"Gung," said Templeton, moving closer to the Hindu, "I want you to tell again the story of what happened to you and Sahib Courtney. Tell it as you like. Sit down here and take your own time."

The Hindu pushed his chair as far from the teakwood table as he possibly could, then with another bow to the thing beneath the cloth, he started to speak.

I cannot write that story here. No one could write it and be believed. It was marvellous, extraordinary, unbelievable. And yet, although our so-called common sense tried to rise up and throw back the statements that poured into our ears, our souls knew that the Hindu was telling the truth. Yes! The story was beyond the possibilities of imagination. No brain could build it up. It had the props of fact beneath it, and we listened with open mouths and throbbing hearts. The narrative dripped truth, and when the Hindu chanted away in the stillness of that room with the little puffs of wind carrying the old, old scents of the Orient to our nostrils, we seemed to see everything that he spoke of. What a story it was! Now and then as we tried to shake ourselves free of the peculiar spell which the Hindu's words put upon us, the story seemed to rise up and overwhelm us with its novelty and force. And the



Hindu is the greatest story-teller in the world. He creates a shadow effect about his paragraphs and it is in the portions of his narrative that he only half tells that the imagination can dive and drag out wonderful thrills. That night in the bungalow in the Garden of Dreams we heard for the first time of the Spotted Panther, of the White *Mias*, of the Parong of Buddha, and a thousand other matters that made the skin upon our necks prickle as Gung unfolded his tale. It was a terrible story.

The Hindu finished as the gray dawn crept into the room, and after a long silence, Chico nodded to the object that was underneath the cloth. "And that is not to be compared with the Great Parong," he said quietly.

Gung made a peculiar noise with his mouth, and rolled his eyes in terror. "There is nothing in the world like the Great Sword," he murmured.

"There is not," said Templeton.

Courtney woke at that moment, and he stared at us with stupid, unseeing eyes. Suddenly he stood up and made a rush at the Chalice of Everlasting Fire, and Gung, horrified at the thought of the wonderful cup being uncovered in his presence, slipped from the room with the speed of a rock snake.

Red Templeton took no notice of Courtney as the latter caught up the chalice and hugged it to his bosom. Templeton was looking at Chico, and Morgan read the longing behind the blue eyes as he returned the glance.

"You are going up?" he asked.

Templeton nodded. "I'm all ready to go," he answered. "But I wanted a mate, a fighting mate, and by the beard of Mahomet, you're the man I want!"

He stood up and put out his hand, and Chico took it. They were two big men, American and Englishman, and they had summed up each other's worth. With the insane Courtney hugging the Chalice of Everlasting Fire, they stood face to face and their grip tightened.

Chico Morgan glanced at the chalice and sighed softly. The first beams of the morning sun had found their way through the window, and the snake made out of the flashing diamonds seemed to thrill with life as the bright rays fell upon him. We felt sure that it was alive. Gung had told us that it represented the Serpent of Death that drank continuously from the Chalice of Life, and it awed us at that moment. And Red Templeton and the Hindu had asserted that



the value of the Great Parong of Buddha was a million times greater than the value of the Vessel of Flame. And we knew that they spoke the truth.

"I'll go," said Chico. "The sooner we start the better."

## CHAPTER III

### THE WHITE MIAS

**W**ITH a desire to save the reader from anything that might seem of little interest, I am omitting a detailed account of the nineteen days that elapsed between that night of the fight in the opium den at Banjermassin and the afternoon of the day we arrived at the Place of Evil Winds. They were nineteen days of hard travel, but there were few happenings in the time that were worth recording. We had travelled up the Barito to its headwaters, crossed the "lallang," or high grass plains, and had entered the jungle fastnesses of the Tawah Mountains. Gung was our only guide and authority. As far as we knew, Courtney, the opium fiend, and the mutineers from the ship of Enrique de Gama were the only white people who had ever travelled over that region. The interior of Borneo is unexplored country, more inaccessible than the darkest portions of Africa, and ten times more uncanny to the person who braves its silent jungles and weird plains. Cross-

ing the grass-covered stretches our ankles were festooned with leeches, and the pests became more troublesome as we advanced. The ten Dyaks and Gung rubbed their ankles at intervals with the juice of the betel nut, and Red Templeton, Chico, and I followed their example.

The Place of Evil Winds was well named. Whether Gung's imagination was responsible for the name, or whether, as he persisted, a man of the Orang Bukkit tribe had translated the meaning of the Kyan word when he visited the place with Courtney, we could not tell, but there was no name that could be more appropriate. It was a section of gray desert, wedged in between walls of surrounding jungle, and that spectral patch of sand was dotted with round boulders that the Dyak carriers looked at with aversion. The care which they exercised in keeping clear of the stones in crossing the strip of desert provoked Templeton's curiosity, and he asked a question.

"Why are they dodging the rocks?" he asked.

Gung, the fountain of wisdom, unbosomed himself. "They are afraid," he murmured. "The fact of the rocks being here explains why the breeze does not blow upon this place."

He pointed to the waving tops of the green walls of tapang, mohor, and sandalwood trees that

hemmed us in on all sides, then he wet his finger and held it up.

"There is no breeze here," he said quietly. "The trees are bowing to the south wind, but it does not blow in this place."

Templeton laughed. "We're sheltered by the trees," he explained. "They act as a barrier, that is why."

Gung's white teeth glistened in a smile that expressed his incredulity. "We think it is these," he said, pointing to the round boulders. "The wind will not blow upon them. They are the ten thousand sons of Prang, and they slew their father. That is why they were turned into stone out here in the waste where the breezes turn aside lest they will wake them."

Templeton looked at Chico, and Chico grinned. "Better leave them alone," he said. "Their beliefs are in their blood, and all our talking wouldn't change them a bit."

I remember that we sat conversing late that evening. Within our brains the story that Gung had told to us that night in Banjermassin was rioting madly. That Chalice of Everlasting Fire was always before our minds, and a score of times upon the journey we had questioned the Hindu concerning the great sword with the emerald handle

that was called the Parong of Buddha. There were a thousand legends told concerning that sword. We had spoken of them in the hot, still nights, and we prayed that Gung's bump of location would take him back to the place where Courtney and he had purloined the chalice from the cave that was close to the *kampong* of the Spotted Panther. It wasn't a treasure hunt that we had set out upon. We were searching for something that was beyond price. The Great Parong had been plaited into the history of the Orient so that it possessed a value that was ten thousand times greater than the mere value of the gold and precious stones of which it was composed.

"You cannot put a value upon it," said Chico, on that evening we camped at the Place of Evil Winds.

"Value?" cried Templeton, as he crawled under his blanket. "If it were possible — if it were possible, I say, to bring the Great Parong of Buddha to Benares and lay it in the Mosque of Arungzebee, there would be a revolution in India inside of seven days! Inside of seven days, mind you! The news would have travelled in that time from Calicut to Chitral, and from Quetta to Mandalay. Great Scott, man! We could stir three hundred million human beings in a way that would make them push

the British into the Bay of Bengal. And the British are my people! I'm a Britisher, but I must go in search of this thing if it wrecks a dozen empires. I'm going to get some sleep. We've got a big march in front of us to-morrow."

I went to sleep and dreamed a dream in which I thought that Chico Morgan and Red Templeton carried the Parang of Buddha to Benares, but the British Government, hearing of the discovery, bribed them to secrecy by making them princes of the Punjaub and Rajputana, Sind, and Nepal.

Chico broke the dream by prodding me gently with the toe of his boot, and with a feeling that something had gone wrong I sprang to my feet. A moon, white and scared-looking, swung above the wall of sandalwood and ebony trees, and everything was washed with a pale light that made it possible to see across the stretch of open desert upon which we had pitched our camp.

Red Templeton and Morgan were standing side by side, their eyes fixed upon the ten Dyaks and the Hindu, who were kneeling in a little cluster upon the sand.

"What's the matter?" I stammered. "What is wrong?"

Templeton's right hand was upon his revolver

as he turned toward me, while Chico held a Winchester ready.

"Do you remember Gung's story about the White *Mias*?" asked Red.

"Yes," I answered. "What about it?"

"Well, these infernal lunatics have got a notion that she is near. We don't know whether Gung has been filling their heads with nonsense, or whether the sight of some big orang-utan has unsettled their nerves, but they're half crazy with fear."

It is strange how the mind stores a remark as if awaiting a suitable opportunity of calling your attention to the wisdom stored within it, and which you probably failed to see when you first heard it. My mind played a trick of that kind upon me at that moment. It recalled the remark of Hooper, an American trader at Singapore, a man who had seen more than any other ten men in the Orient. "Belief," said Hooper, "is only a matter of stage setting. If you have the right atmosphere for a story the hearer can believe anything."

Now on that night at Banjermassin when Gung told of the big White *Mias* who came down out of the mountains with the orang-utan legion to harry the Trings, the Orang Bukkit, Punans, and other sub-tribes of the Kyans, we didn't pay much attention. The story of the Chalice of Ever-



lasting Fire and the treasure which Courtney and the Hindu left behind them in the hills made the tale of the queen of the orang-utans a minor matter, but when I stood with Templeton and Chico watching those half score Dyaks and the shivering Gung, that story took on a complexion that was totally different. The fear which gripped the eleven seemed to come out to us. Templeton and Chico, two men who had faced ten thousand dangers, watched the surrounding jungle with keen eyes, and Red cursed softly under his breath. The tops of the trees were still waving slightly as if nodding to us, and we thought of Gung's story about the wind as we looked at all points of the compass.

"That infernal Hindu has told them tales till he has put their nerves on edge," growled Templeton. "Get them up, Morgan! They'll work themselves into a state of hysteria if we leave them there much longer."

Chico and I were just longing for something to do at that moment, and we started in with a will to break up the cluster. But the danger which the eleven sensed upon the air bound them tighter than iron bands. A few hours before they had been quarrelling with each other, but now when Chico and I attempted to stop their infernal whimpering by dragging them apart, the enemies flung their arms



around each other, so that when we tried to lift one to his feet, we were handicapped by the weight of the other ten trying to keep him upon his knees. It made Chico as vicious as a bobtailed viper.

"Get up!" he yelled. "You infernal idiots! No *Mias*! No! It's a fool yarn!"

"*Mias, tuan!*" they groaned. "*Devil Mias!*"

Chico got Gung by the shoulders, and by sheer brute strength lifted him to his feet. "Tell them that yarn is a lie!" he roared. "Tell them, you old fakir! Quick!"

"It's true, sahib!" gasped the choking Hindu. "It's all true!"

Morgan shook him till his teeth rattled, but Gung wouldn't contradict the yarn that he had circulated, and when Chico dropped him to the ground he crawled to the ten Dyaks and snuggled in among their half-naked bodies in a vain attempt to ease the fear which gripped his heart.

"We had better leave them alone," said Templeton. "They won't get their wits till daylight. When morning comes I'll give Gung a taste of a switch that will stop him from putting over any more of his yellow-press stories while we're in this neighbourhood."

We sat down upon a boulder and watched the fear-stricken eleven. They writhed and twisted like

a bunch of water snakes, each trying to get in the middle of the clump, as if possessed of the idea that the middle man could derive a feeling of security from the knowledge that his companions were around him. And those movements seemed to charge the night with a sense of dread in the same manner that an impending thunderstorm affects the atmosphere. Red Templeton felt uneasy, Chico hugged his rifle and watched the surrounding jungle, and I heaped silent curses upon the head of Gung, who seemed to be a breeding-ground for fear, the germs of which he spread broadcast each time he opened his mouth. I have never heard a storyteller like Gung. Every word he uttered was a cloak under which Terror invaded the mind of the listener, and we had no blame for the half score of Dyaks that he had made crazy with his stories.

"Gung has started all the trouble," muttered Templeton. "This mob will be in a nice state for marching to-morrow, eh?"

"I think it would be good business to shift camp now," said Chico. "This patch of sand has something about it that they don't like, and if we could move them on we might quiet them down."

"That's true," cried Red. "We'll have another try to get them on their feet."

We struggled until we were exhausted trying to bring the natives to their senses. Chico Morgan and Templeton dragged them to their feet, while I tried to hold them there, but it was no use. Fear had loosened the muscles of their legs, and again and again they slipped through our hands and tied themselves into a knot of greasy limbs that defied all our efforts.

"Give it up," ordered Templeton. "It's too late to move now. The moon is setting."

"I hope this game doesn't become chronic with them," growled Chico, as we went to our seats on the big boulder. "I'm as sleepy as a sloth."

"Turn in," said Red. "I'll watch this lot for a while. They'll get tired soon and they'll go off to sleep. You get a nap, too, Lenford. There's no need for the three of us to remain awake."

Chico and I went back to our blankets, and in spite of the groaning of the natives, we were asleep in half a minute. Sleep is more powerful than fear. When a man has been climbing over rough country for a day it requires something more than a feeling of insecurity to keep him awake. We had no knowledge of the White *Mias* outside Gung's stories, and we had the conceit of the white race which made us turn a deaf ear to anything that was beyond our own experiences. With the matter of the Chalice

of Everlasting Flame and the Great Parong it was different. We knew of that cup. Every breeze that blew from nipa-palm *kampongs* and lonely jungle huts carried some legend of the wonderful Chalice and Sword, but Gung was the first to tell of the White *Mias*.

It was the sound of Templeton's revolver that brought Chico and me to our feet. It seemed as if we had been asleep only five minutes, yet the moon had disappeared when we looked around, and the sandy stretch that was named the Place of Evil Winds was as dark as the Caves of Beli. We couldn't see Templeton or the Dyaks, but the yelling of the natives made it easy to locate them.

"Where are you, Templeton?" cried Chico.

"Here," answered Red.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing much. Something moved here to the right, and I took a shot at it."

"Do you see anything?" asked Morgan.

"No, but I hit it. If you — Look out! Morgan! *Look out!*"

I've tried to develop the mental film which recorded the happenings of the two minutes that passed after Red Templeton gave his shout of warning. I am afraid to put my blurred impressions upon paper, but I must. If the moon had been

above the horizon we could have seen, but as there was no light we could only feel with our skins and sniff with our nostrils.

All I know is that something came from the jungle in our rear, something that swept over us like a wave of hairy bodies. Great God! what a sensation of horror that charge produced! Our souls seemed to shrink in terror from contact with the clawing, screaming mass that surged over us, and each time a body touched us it produced a physical revulsion that we had never experienced before. That in itself was extraordinary. The touch of an orang-utan in the darkness might well occasion fear, but the touch of that mass created a sick feeling that seemed to be a terror of the soul more than a terror of the body. Perhaps the atmosphere created by the moaning of Gung and the ten Dyaks might have had something to do with this, but I know that Templeton, Morgan, and myself experienced sensations that were hard to analyze as we were buffeted by flying bodies and clawed at by invisible paws.

Red Templeton fired twice, Chico three times, while I took a shot at the rear of the wave after I had been knocked backward by a collision with a flying body.

It was when I fired that I saw the streak of white.

It passed before me and the flash of Morgan's rifle revealed it to me. And that flash of white that brought Gung's story to my mind was the tail end of the procession. Stunned and stupefied, we stood and listened to the thumping of heavy bodies on the sand, the crashing of boughs as the wave hit the fringe of the jungle, and then, as if the noise of the animals had prevented us from hearing other noises, we woke up to the fact that the screams of the Dyaks came from a great distance, and were gradually growing fainter.

"Where are you, Morgan?" roared Templeton. "Quick, man! the brutes have stampeded the Dyaks!"

"They've taken the back trail!" cried Chico. "Come on! We might catch up with them!"

Chico started running in the direction we had come from on the previous afternoon, and Red Templeton and I ran behind him at full speed. The Dyaks had stampeded. They had held their ground during the early evening because they were in doubt as to which way to go in order to dodge the thing they dreaded, but the moment the wave of hairy bodies had struck us, they had fled.

We ran for hours. Now and then we thought we



heard a yell from the natives somewhere far in advance of us, but when we stopped to listen, we could hear nothing but the sighing of the wind in the jungle. Gung and his half score were on their way back to the headwaters of the Barito, and they were making good speed.

"It's no use!" cried Red. "We've lost them."

He flung himself on the ground, and Chico and I stretched ourselves beside him. We were exhausted after that run.

"It will be dawn in a few hours," said Templeton. "Let us have a sleep and then get back to the camp in the daylight."

"Right," muttered Chico, and without a thought of the dangers that lay in front of us or the arduous work which we would be compelled to perform now that the carriers had deserted, we fell asleep. The sight of the Chalice of Everlasting Fire and the stories of the Great Sword had created a fever within our brains that made us oblivious to dangers that would have disheartened us if we had not seen the cup or listened to the stories of the Great Parong. We could not turn back. An indescribable feeling urged us forward, a feeling that mere treasure was incapable of bringing to our minds. Across the China Sea were millions of people waiting for the great blade that had been carried into the

hills when the Orang Bukkit tribes had captured the mutineers of Enrique de Gama, and it seemed as if their longings to see the sword were pushing us into the untravelled and mysterious land that stretched before us.



## CHAPTER IV

### A CROSS IN THE JUNGLE

**T**HE most wonderful dawn that ever stained the heavens greeted us the morning after the stampede. Heavenly geysers flooded the pearl-gray bowl above our heads with rivers of orange and chrome, baby-pink and carmine, and we sat and watched the sight. The mountains of Tawah looked like a fringe of blue chiffon tacked upon the cloth of gold and orange which was flung across the eastern sky.

"Come on," said Templeton, after we had sat for some twenty minutes gazing at the sight. "That sky is mighty beautiful, but we're close to something that is so wonderful that three hundred million people will go insane when they hear that it is in our possession."

We didn't need any further prompting. Dawn or Dyaks or anything else could not pull us from the purpose of the trip, and without a word we started back over the ground we had covered when pursuing Gung and the startled carriers.

We struck the camp about nine o'clock and as we walked across the gray sand stretch, Chico pointed ahead to an object that lay between the camp and the jungle.

"We've got one trophy," he said. "Look!"

We hurried across to the thing that lay upon the sand, and we walked around it in silence. It was an enormous orang-utan, larger than any we had ever seen or read of. The rifle bullet that had ended his mad charge had struck him between the small eyes, and he had fallen backward, the tremendous arms clutching at the sand in his death agony. The big chest of the brute was covered with coarse red hair that was fully eighteen inches in length, while the teeth, stained black with the juices of fruit and vegetables, were showing under the thick lips.

"A nice visitor to come hopping over one's camp in the dark," said Morgan, kicking the big carcass. "If you had turned up in daylight, you brute, we might have kept our niggers with us. Now we'll have to pack our own provisions because you had no idea of social etiquette."

We cooked and ate our breakfast, then sorted out our baggage, left what we could not carry, and turned our faces to the jungle. It was useless attempting to cache what we could not take with us

as it was impossible for us to say by what route we would return to the Barito River, and we guessed that the orang-utans would make short work of a cache if we took the trouble to construct one. Besides, we had a firm conviction that we would not starve while we had ammunition, so we shouldered our packs cheerfully and walked forward. Like Jason, of old, we thought only of the thing we had set out to seek, and the pictures of the Great Parong that were in our minds blotted out the dangers which lay in our path. Now and then I shuddered as I looked around at the encompassing jungle and thought over Gung's stories, but I am absolutely certain that Chico Morgan and Red Templeton had no fear. No bigger men ever invaded unknown country than those two, and I am sure that they had forgotten the orang-utan incident long before noon on the day following.

It was a little after noon when we made a discovery. Red Templeton, in endeavouring to get a shot at a wild pig, dived into a thick mass of sandalwood trees, and it was his shout that brought Chico and me to his side. Red was standing still and contemplating a rough cross of stone that stood in a tiny clearing in the centre of the tree cluster!

The cross was about four feet high, built, excepting the crosspiece, of small stones that had become

moss-grown through the years. The crosspiece was a single slab of sandstone that had been roughly chiselled, and that, too, showed that many a year of rain and sunshine had passed over it since it had been placed in position.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Chico. "Did any one — Say, we're pretty close!"

He looked at Templeton, and the Englishman nodded.

"Closer than we thought."

"Sure," said Chico. "Why, we might have blundered into trouble if you hadn't noticed this. Gung must have made a mistake about the distance."

"We might be miles away yet," said the Britisher. "Whoever built this wouldn't put it up close to the *kampong* of the Dyaks. This is, or was, a little private chapel as old as St. Paul's or older."

It was peculiar what effect that emblem of Christianity had upon us as we stood and stared at it. If we had come face to face with a carven Buddha or a rude representation of a two-headed wood devil, we would not have been surprised, but the lonely emblem of the Crucifixion clutched at our throats as we walked around it. It seemed to throw a peculiar atmosphere over the little clearing in the tree clump, and it seemed to our

startled eyes that it held within its moss-grown stones the hopes and fears of those who had prayed before it in that place of silence and gloom. It was a splendid outpost of civilization, and in the minutes that we stood silently around it, our thoughts went flying back to places that were thousands of miles from that lonely cross.

Templeton examined the stones carefully in an effort to find some date or word that would show whether the cross had been erected by one of the mutinous sailors of the galleon of Enrique de Gama, or by one of their descendants, but there were no marks to identify the architect. He had built it, prayed before it, and had gone the way of all flesh.

"P'raps the tribe has shifted miles from this point since this was erected," said Chico. "The hill Dyaks are great wanderers."

"That's a fact," admitted Templeton. "We may be a long distance from the goal. It's a pity Gung bolted with the carriers."

With our eyes upon the cross we circled it slowly, viewing it from all points and wondering stupidly concerning the man or men who had erected it. If they were the sailors of Enrique de Gama who had put a dying message upon the bottom of the Chalice of Everlasting Fire, the stone cross was proof that they had not been butchered by their

captors. And if it had been erected by De Gama's men, it proved that they had not been close prisoners of the tribe. The position of the moss-covered emblem of faith seemed to suggest a desire for privacy on the part of the builder, since the century old trees that surrounded the spot gave visible proof that no Dyak village had occupied the site since the erection of the cross.

"But it wouldn't have remained in good order all these years," said Templeton, pausing to survey it closely. "Why, there's not a loose stone around the base. If it had been built by one of the Portuguese sailors it would have been laid flat unless it had been cared for. If there ——"

Red stopped as Chico gave a little cry of joy. Morgan was on his knees examining the ground at a spot about twenty feet from the base of the cross, and as we hurried to his side we saw the reason for the cry. Templeton's argument was good. The cross would have probably fallen to pieces through the years if others had not looked after it, and when we stood beside Chico Morgan we felt that we were on the point of finding out something about those who had kept the stones together. Chico was kneeling beside a beaten patch of earth about two feet square, and leading back from that patch, stretching away into the jungle, was a faint trail!



That little track was hardly more distinct than the path which a leopard beats to his favourite watering place, but we knew that no animal had made it. The beaten circle at the end of the path told its story. The person or persons who had worshipped in that silent grove had walked to that little circle, contemplated the cross at a distance, and had then retired along the trail by which they had come.

"By George!" gasped Templeton. "What do you make of it?"

"That some one still holds the cross in reverence," answered Chico. "Either some of the descendants of your Portuguese sailors are familiar with its meaning, or the Dyaks, ignorant of what it stands for, have set it up as a fetish. Some one has been in the habit of coming here, and that some one has been here recently."

"What do you mean by recently?" asked Templeton.

"Inside twenty-four hours," answered Morgan. "The tracks are fresh. Feet in leather sandals, and small feet at that."

The big Englishman whistled softly as we stood and looked at each other. We felt that we were on the verge of a tremendous discovery, and we stared at the stone cross as if we doubted our eyes. We

could hardly believe that any descendant of De Gama's sailors would understand the significance of the moss-grown emblem, and yet there was proof that some one had been in the habit of approaching that little pile of stones, standing on the bare, beaten circle, and then retreating by the same path over which he had approached.

Chico spoke after a short silence. "Were there any women aboard the Portuguese ship?" he asked.

"Couldn't answer that," said Templeton. "There might have been, but the betting is against it. Enrique was little short of a pirate, I guess, and his boat would hardly be the place for ladies. In those days, a captain who wandered into these seas came with the intention of picking up all the loot he could get his hands on, and he trusted to Providence and the fighting strength of his crew to cut his way back to the west."

"It's a puzzle," muttered Chico. "How the dickens ——"

A wild pig broke through the underbrush close to the spot where the little path went burrowing into the jungle, scampered across the clearing, and disappeared. Another followed, and Templeton sprang behind a creeper growth that covered a stunted mohor tree.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Some one is coming!"



We dived behind the green screen, and from tiny peepholes watched the path. Some one had startled the wild pigs, and we imagined that the person approaching was the one whose feet had beaten the little path to the cross.

With straining ears we listened for a sound while our eyes were glued upon the path. Now and then we heard the snapping of a twig or the rustle of dead leaves, but we could see nothing. If some one were approaching — and we felt certain that a human being was near — the approaching one was not using the little path. He was pushing his way through the undergrowth, and he was using extreme caution in doing so. If the wild pigs had not alarmed us, it is certain that we should not have noticed the slight noises which came to our ears.

The little noises of snapping twigs and rustling leaves ceased, and in the silence that followed Templeton lifted a warning finger and pointed through his spyhole at a place on the opposite side of the clearing. For a minute Morgan and I could see nothing, then our eyes pounced upon the spot that Templeton had located. Thrust through the foliage was the yellowish-brown face of a Kyan, his beady, black eyes searching the little clearing in which stood the lonely moss-covered cross!

The examination was thorough. As the sharp

eyes passed over the screen of leaves which concealed us from view, we drew back quickly, wondering for an instant if the instinct of the savage would tell him of our presence, but the next moment we were reassured. The native stepped into the open, and we had a full view.

He was a tall, muscular Kyan, wearing a *chawat* of bark cloth around his loins, half a dozen fibre rings around each ankle, and a score of shell bracelets upon the right wrist. He carried a wooden shield, the front of which was decorated with some twoscore tufts of human hair, and in his right hand he gripped the deadly blowpipe. His thighs were tattooed with spiral designs that we had never seen upon any of the coast Dyaks, and his body was streaked with white clay, the streaks radiating from a charm that hung upon his chest. Altogether he struck us as being a fierce-looking specimen, and the bunches of human hair that flapped up and down upon his shield did not impress us in his favour as he walked forward.

He stopped when he reached the bare spot at the end of the path where we had stood a few moments before, and he was on the point of stooping to examine the ground when his keen ears warned him that the moment was not opportune. With a single bound he sprang back to his hiding-place,

and we turned our eyes upon the path. And this time we seemed to know that the person who regularly visited the cross was approaching by the narrow path through the jungle.

If I live through the next century, I shall never forget that first view of Nao, the Golden One. I couldn't forget it. She stood in a frame of green, and for a moment we thought that she was a wood nymph belonging to the dark woods of tapang and sandalwood. Diana of old was never more radiantly beautiful or full of life. As we stared, forgetful for the moment of the wild-looking Kyan who had plunged into the undergrowth, we thought of her as the spirit of the hills, the living embodiment of the good that was in that uncharted jungle. She was a wonder woman.

Taller than the ordinary woman, she possessed, with the unusual height, all the grace and suppleness of the jungle-born. She wore a small *kabayah*, or jacket, cut low around the neck and barely covering the breasts, together with a *sarong* or petticoat, that was wound around the waist. Between the *kabayah* and the *sarong* she wore, Dyak fashion, a dozen girdles of cane that were so completely covered with tiny gold rings that none of the cane was visible. The *sarong* was blue, a beautiful Venetian blue, and it was edged with tiny

pearls and turquoises. Her hair hung in two great plaits, while the black masses above her brow were held back by a silver comb of native workmanship, in which a ruby glowed like the eye of an *aintu*, or hill spirit.

The face of the girl was more beautiful than any face we had ever seen. She was beauty itself. All the witchery and dreaminess of the Orient were in the big dark eyes that were deeper than the whirlpool of San Larn. The nose was exquisitely modelled, the lips redder than the blush upon Mount Pemabo when the sun kisses it as he comes up out of the Celebes Sea. By the glory of Solomon! she was a magnificent woman. The sight of her gripped us like the clutch of death itself, and we looked upon her beauty with eyes that made the brain forget everything else.

Her two slim hands held back the green branches while her eyes looked at the cross. Her nostrils seemed to be sniffing the air like a mountain deer that suspects danger, and I know that in the moment she stood at the edge of the clearing, like a perfect statue, a horror lest she should turn and flee came upon us.

Chico Morgan gave a little sigh of relief as one of the small feet in its curious sandal of pigskin was put forward haltingly. It seemed as if the

girl sensed danger, but that she was attempting to throw off the dread brought to her by her skin. Slowly, very slowly, she advanced toward the cross, and if we doubted whether the person who made that path understood the significance of the little pile of stones, the doubt fled from our minds as we watched her face.

The heathen approaches his fetish with a look of fear upon his face, but there was no fear upon the face of the Golden One. Her eyes were the eyes of a trusting worshipper, and as we looked at those eyes we seemed to see the girl's naked soul. I think we witnessed a miracle just then. Up in that jungle that was more inaccessible than the Gidi Desert or the slopes of the Nan Shan Mountains, a woman was clinging to a belief that refused to die. As we looked at her we thought of the three hundred years that had elapsed since the Portuguese sailors of Enrique de Gama had been taken into the hills as the prisoners of the Orang Bukkit, and we seemed to read the past in the big eyes that were soft and limpid as they looked upon the cross. We saw it all. Through the centuries a belief had lived, and we thrilled as we peered at her from our leafy shelter. One of De Gama's sailors or officers had erected that cross in the jungle, and generation after generation had come to pray before it. The knowl-

edge choked us. We pictured those descendants coming to that spot, drawn there by the germ of belief planted in the subconscious brain, their knowledge of the faith growing less with each succeeding generation. It was an extraordinary happening. We stared at the girl in the clearing and wondered as to her knowledge of the symbol that had been set up in that lonely spot in the jungle.

The red lips moved, and a prayer as soft as the flutter of an angel's wing went out into the stillness. Red Templeton's head was thrust forward to catch the whispered words, and the look of amazement upon his sun-tanned face deepened as he caught the whisper. Chico and I glanced at Red, and we knew well that he understood the language in which the invocation was couched.

Softly, ever so softly, the woman sent her little supplication into the silence, and a feeling of shame gripped us as we listened. The place was as holy as a church, and we were listening to the prayer of a girl whose *kabayah* heaved and fell under the stress of her emotions.

Suddenly Chico Morgan shifted his position. His right hand was thrust through the curtain of green, his Colt shattered the stillness of the place, and before Templeton or I could bring our thoughts back to the incident that had preceeded the arrival

of the girl, the Kyan warrior stumbled out of the bushes and fell full length upon the grass. We understood then why Chico had fired. Although mortally wounded, the native made an attempt to turn the deadly blowpipe upon the girl as he threshed around in his death agony.



## CHAPTER V

### WE TAKE ANOTHER PARTNER

IT WAS strange how the intuition of the girl enabled her to take in the situation the moment Chico fired the shot. Probably she had never heard the report of a gun in her life, yet when she glanced at the Kyan clutching the grass in his death struggles, and then at Templeton, Chico, and myself, she understood immediately. And she understood more. Without one of us making a move to enlighten her, she knew that it was Morgan who had killed the would-be assassin, and with a little cry of thankfulness she fell upon her knees and kissed the hand that held the revolver.

Chico blushed like a schoolgirl as he listened to the torrent of words that fell from the red lips, and he turned helplessly to Templeton as he lifted the girl to her feet.

"What does she speak?" he cried. "Portuguese, isn't it? Tell her it was nothing! Don't stand and stare at her, man!"

Red Templeton jerked himself out of the trance

into which he seemed to slip when he heard the girl whisper her prayer to the cross. He fired a question at her in Portuguese, and after a moment's hesitation she answered it. Chico and I stood and stared at that vision with open mouths as she spoke rapidly. That happening was something that would amaze the greatest stoic that ever lived. We had struck a link with the past, and as we looked at Templeton, we saw that her words stirred him in a way that made us madly excited to hear them translated.

"What is it?" cried Morgan. "Don't keep us waiting! Tell us!"

The girl was still clinging to Chico's hand, and she seemed to cling tighter as Red swung round upon us.

"By all that is wonderful! we've struck it!" he cried. "It's amazing! She speaks a mixture of Portuguese and Malay, and I'll swear to heaven she's a descendant of Enrique de Gama's sailors!"

"But what does she say?" asked Chico. "Why does she point to the back trail?"

"She wants us to clear out at once," answered Templeton.

"Why?"

Red took a glance around, then at the Kyan upon the ground. "We're close to the *kampong* of the Spotted Panther," he said. "Do you hear me?"

She says it's close, and she wants us to clear out before he gets his eyes upon us."

"Does she stay there?" questioned Chico.

"Yes. Wait a moment and I'll ask her about the treasure."

Templeton opened his mouth to put a question concerning the Sword of Buddha, but Chico clutched his arm. "Don't ask her any questions about that!" he cried. "That wouldn't be fair play!"

"Why?" asked Red.

"She is with them," snapped Morgan. "And we don't want to burrow secrets out of her because we stopped the Kyan with the blowpipe."

Templeton and Chico looked at each other, and the girl watched them with her big eyes. And she seemed to divine the cause of their little disagreement at that moment. It was wonderful. With a sudden twist of her arm she tore the big ruby comb from the hair that was blacker than the Jade Goddess of Sarm, and she thrust the thing into Morgan's hand as she talked rapidly.

"Now she's talking treasure," said Red. "She senses the reason that brought us up here, and she wants you to take the big ruby and go back."

Chico smiled gently as he put the comb back into the girl's hand. "Tell her we are not going back," he said. "We are going straight ahead if there are a

dozen Spotted Panthers in the way. And tell her it will be better for her to break connections with us right now."

"What's the hurry?" asked Templeton.

"What's the hurry?" repeated Chico. "We don't want to make her a traitor, do we? Let her go her own way and we'll go ours."

Red smiled as he turned to the girl with the message. Morgan was sensitive about receiving any information from the beautiful stranger, but the Britisher couldn't see matters in the same light. We had come up to that place with the intention of looting what the Orang Bukkit tribe had looted from the Portuguese ship three hundred years before, and Templeton didn't care how we got the information as long as we got it.

But he translated Chico's message to the girl. We knew that by the manner in which she acted after the Englishman spoke. Morgan's hand was taken in a tight grip between her two small ones, and she hurled a torrent of words at Templeton.

"She won't leave us," said Red, translating rapidly. "You won her over by putting a bullet in the head of the gentleman who tried to assassinate her. He's a Tring, and they're at war with the tribe bossed by the Spotted Panther. This girl's name is

Nao, or the Golden One, and there are three others in the *kampong* that speak Portuguese."

Chico tried to disengage his hand, but the Golden One would not be shaken off, and Chico's tanned face reddened. I think the big American would have turned and run away had it not been for the fact that the stone cross in the grove of sandalwood trees, together with the appearance of the girl, convinced us that we were close to the Great Parong of Buddha, and the feeling stirred a madness in us that made it impossible for us to retreat. The fever caused by the discovery of the cross made us forget the affair of the previous night, and it worked us up to such a pitch of excitement that we were incapable of forming any idea of the dangers that lay in front of us.

"If we are going forward she intends to stick to us and help us all she can," said Templeton. "That is what she says. What's the use of your kicking against fate? I've told her what we're after and it doesn't surprise her. Why, man, she must be the descendant of an officer of De Gama's. An officer, not a common sailor! I'll swear she is! And if the truth were known, the best part of the treasure that is supposed to be in these hills should belong to her!"

"There's a lot of sense in that argument," said Chico. "I guess she's the rightful claimant to the

most of it. That is, if we acknowledge the right of Enrique de Gama to it in the first instance."

We stood and looked at each other and the girl. Whoever named her the Golden One named her well. There were depths in her eyes that held all the glamour and wonder of the world. Saints be praised! wasn't she beautiful! She seemed to be as old as the hills and yet as young as the dawn. And she had the mystery of all women. One would think that her eyes were the eyes of Helen, yet her face had the purity of St. Monica's.

And she seemed to understand the matter that was in dispute at that moment. I don't know how she gripped it, but I know that she did. We have little knowledge of the inherited impressions that are stored in the cells of the brain and we were ignorant of the thoughts that welled up in the mind of that girl when she got the first glimpse of us. She was looking backward, straining after words that had escaped her, searching for memories that had been lost through the years. God alone knows how she struggled to make the hazy dreams seem real; to build up the bridges that made connections with a past that she had been robbed of by fate.

Suddenly she sprang erect, made a rush toward the moss-grown cross, touched it daintily with her fingers, then slipping back to the spot where we stood



she touched our hands in turn, as she made verbal explanation to Templeton and signalled that he translate for Chico and me.

"She says that the cross binds the four of us together," said Red, half choking with emotion as he spoke. "Saints be praised! what has this girl dreamed of in this infernal place?"

The eyes of Nao flashed as a phrase seemed to spring out of the mental reticule into which words had fallen through disuse. She opened her mouth to speak, lost the phrase, waited an instant, then in exultation she seized Templeton by the sleeve as the forgotten words were recalled.

"*A cruz de Deus traz-nos todos unidos!*" cried Nao, repeating again and again the words which Templeton had translated, and pointing as she spoke toward the cross. And her voice thrilled us.

The Golden One put out a little hand to Chico, and Morgan took the small fingers, lifted them to his lips and kissed them. And she stood like a princess while he tendered the salute. Breeding? Of course there was breeding! I'll wager that some of the bluest blood in old Portugal was with Enrique de Gama, and that blood showed in the actions of the girl, who was fairer than the houris who wait to open the door of the Mahommedan paradise. She swept us off our feet at that moment. She was our kin, and by the



bones of Tamerlane she seemed to become regal when she spoke to us. If we had met her on the Praco do Rocio at Lisbon in conventional dress we should have thought her some blue-blooded beauty from the big houses on the Avenida da Liberdade. If Enrique de Gama hadn't any aristocratic names on his register, we guessed that the long-dead Portuguese, from whom Nao was descended, must have shipped under an alias.

"*Nos somos amigos*," she murmured.

"She is asking if we will be friends," said Templeton.

"Friends?" repeated Chico. "Ay! till we die! And we'll get the Parong of Buddha and all the other loot, and you'll share in it. And we'll take you back to where you belong. We will! Back to the lemon and the orange groves of Lisbon and the moonlit nights and the tinkling guitars. By the powers above we will!"

That girl seemed to know what he said before Templeton explained a word of it. I guess she read it in Chico's eyes, that were mighty moist at that moment. Her *kabayah* heaved as if the longings of years would burst her little heart, and her smile was something that no artist in the world could put on canvas.

That seemed a rather big boast of Chico Morgan's

when one considered the magnitude of the job that lay in front of us, but Chico never looked at the size of a proposition he attempted to handle. He looked instead into his own breast to see if he had a conviction that he was going to win, and if he had that feeling, the size of the job didn't matter. And he had a firm belief that we were going to recover some of the wonderful loot of which Gung had spoken as we sat and stared at the Chalice of Everlasting Fire. Chico had faced death a thousand times, and the stories that he had heard concerning the might of the Spotted Panther had no terrors for him. Nor had Red Templeton any fear. It is the big shoulders that are picked to carry the big burdens, and the girl seemed to feel the confidence possessed by Templeton and Morgan as she stood and looked at them.

"Leesbon!" whispered the Golden One. "Leesbon!"

"Ay! Lisbon!" cried Chico. "Does it sound familiar? Why the name has stuck in her mind like a date seed in a pudding. Ask her, Templeton, if she remembers anything that her people told her."

Red put the question, and the Golden One stood for a moment thinking. Then she burst forth in the sweetest little melody that we had ever listened to. It was a Portuguese love song, and as she warbled it

we seemed to sniff the fragrance of the fruit groves along the Tagus, and hear the tinkling of the mandolins and the swish of the dancing girls. That song had been improved during the three hundred years it had been sung up in those fastnesses. All the longing brought by years of exile had been plaited into it, and it tugged at the heart with chains of steel. And the desire for the home that she was ignorant of was in the blood of the singer, who had the eyes of wonder and the face of the dawn.

For a few moments after she had finished singing we did not speak, then the girl led each of us to the moss-grown cross and made us touch it with our right hands. Thus was our partnership sealed and signed.

"Now," said Templeton, "we'll be moving on. The afternoon is closing in."

Nao smiled at Chico, stepped forward along the path by which she had come, and we followed without a moment's hesitation. We had implicit faith in her from the moment we first saw her. Treachery had no place in her make-up, and our brains rioted with thoughts of the Parong of Buddha as we followed her through the jungle. We were close to it, and the knowledge had an effect upon us that would be impossible for us to explain. No amount of ordinary treasure trove could produce the thrills we experienced. As we followed her silently we

pictured the three hundred millions of India, and the other millions scattered through Tibet, China, and Japan, rising up to greet the marvellous sword that we would carry again into the light.

We had gorgeous dreams as we tramped along behind the girl. She was a dream herself. As we looked at the masses of black hair, and the *kabayah* and the blue *sarong* with its trimming of seed pearls and turquoises, we built up dreams of golden mist that reached to the stars. We stood upon the stilts of our imagination and spun visions with our heads in the spindrift of the whirling planets. We could laugh at Jason, Marco Polo, Pizarro, and every other treasure hunter that ever went into the unknown. We were close to the biggest treasure that the world had ever heard of, a treasure that was above values, because all the money in the world could not produce a thousandth part of the thrills which its discovery would bring to the waiting Orient. We walked on air. We forgot everything but the words of the Hindu in which he had described what he had seen through the cleft in the rock on the night when he had appropriated the Chalice of Everlasting Fire.

Once when I had made a whispered remark to Chico concerning the stampede of the previous evening, Morgan looked at me in the manner of a man

who is trying to recall something that has been blotted out by more recent happenings. And there was enough in the happenings of the morning to blot out the incident of the night previous when the orang-utan legion had terrorized the Dyak carriers. That lone cross in the jungle came up before our minds a thousand times, and our thoughts went back to it as if we considered it a friend in that wilderness.

It was near sunset when the Golden One called a halt. Very cautiously she drew aside the green screen of vines immediately in front of the spot where she was standing, and then, one by one, she invited us to look. And we looked through that spyhole with feelings of wild amazement. Stretching out before us was the most ungodly quaking morass that we had ever seen. It was a terrible place. The great, slimy stretch was studded with patches of green that shivered like half-frozen jellies, and as we watched those shivering mouths we could hear the morass gurgling softly as if asking for something for its quaking stomach. It was a horrible, fear-inspiring place, and it brought upon me a feeling of nausea as I stared at it.

The girl spoke to Templeton and Red translated.

"She says it is the Million Mouths of Boorsh," he said. "In those copper-coloured slopes on the other side is the *kampong* of the Spotted Panther."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MOUTHS OF BOORSH

**I**T IS the immobility of a morass that terrorizes the onlooker. Man has never feared anything that is full of life. He loves the sea, and if we can judge by sailors' chanteys, the love grows greater the more old Neptune disturbs his domain. But a slimy morass conjures up visions of the crocodile waiting motionless for its prey, of the horned viper of the Sahara that buries itself in the sand with only the head visible to the traveller. I know that we had unpleasant thoughts as we looked at the stretch of slime with the strange green mouths that were scarce a yard from each other. A million mouths! Why the place had a trillion, and as we stared at them they seemed to shake gently as if a devil within the mass of jelly was laughing at our discomfiture at finding such an obstruction in our path.

"Great Scott!" muttered Morgan. "That looks poisonous!"

"It's an unwholesome looking spot," said Templeton.



"And what are we to do now?" asked Chico.  
"Will you inquire?"

The Golden One spoke volubly as Red questioned her, and he turned to us with the information.

"There's a secret track across the place," he said.  
"We must stay here till the moon comes up. She must leave us now, but she will come back and pilot us across."

"Why can't we go now?" asked Morgan.

"There are watchers among the rocks on the other side. We couldn't get close in the daytime."

"And won't they be around just as plentiful when we cross?" questioned Chico.

"No," said Templeton; "they've got the same complaint that Gung and the carriers suffered from. They're afraid of the White *Mias*."

Chico opened his mouth to speak, stopped, and turned toward the swamp. We were watching, too. Something was crashing through the underbrush, and as we stared, a small boar broke from the jungle with a larger animal of the same species hard upon its track. The foam-flecked brute in the lead was out on the morass before he seemed to realize his position, and the pursuer was so blind with rage that he followed madly.

"Ugh!" cried Morgan. "Look how those green patches shiver!"



The pursued boar attempted to make a dash for the bank, but his antagonist headed him off. Grunting loudly, the fugitive made a sudden turn to go back over the ground that he had covered, but one of the mouths was ready for that turn. The pig slipped, went headfirst into the green patch, and disappeared bodily. The grass upon the lip of the place rocked up and down in a manner that brought a horrible suggestion of mastication to our minds.

"Father o' me!" gasped Red. "Watch the other!"

The pursuing boar had halted the moment that he saw his quarry disappear, then, quivering with fear, and with his bristles erect, he backed from the quaking mouth. But, alas! for the pig! His hind feet slipped into another of the horrible openings, and with a wild squeal of terror he disappeared.

Chico looked at the Golden One, and the girl put out her hand as she spoke swiftly to Templeton.

"She has to leave us at once," said Red. "We must stay under cover right here, and she will be back the moment the moon rises."

The girl smiled sweetly, slipped out of the bushes, and ran along the edge of the morass for about fifty yards. Here she turned toward the middle of the swamp, and we watched her from our hiding-place. Very slowly and with much care she made her way,

zigzagging cautiously across the morass. Now she would move fifteen or twenty paces to the right, go straight ahead for another score, and then move to the left in order to get a clear path between the treacherous mouths that were like so many ulcers in the thin, slimy crust of the place.

She was over three quarters of an hour crossing to the copper-covered hills on the far side, and we gave a little sigh of relief as we saw her disappear. The manner in which those two pigs had gone from our sight had upset our nerves.

"Well," muttered Templeton, dragging his gaze from the hills on the far side, "we're in the business to the end now. The real game will start to-night. I think the girl will act honestly with us."

"Of course she will," growled Chico. "I'd gamble my life on her."

"And now what's the plan of campaign?" asked Red.

"Locate the hiding-place of the sword and get away with it as quickly as possible," said Morgan. "We don't want to give battle to the whole village. How many did she say are living there?"

"It's a big *kampong*. There must be a couple of thousand."

"Then we'll show discretion," muttered Chico. "If I get my hands upon that big prize with its

handle of emerald I won't stop running till I reach the Barito."

The sun dropped lower and lower, and we sat there in the tangle of creepers and waited patiently. We felt that we were very close to the wonder that we were in search of. I don't know why we felt so confident, but the very eeriness of our surroundings seemed to make us feel that our expedition would be successful. Still, when we thrust our chances under the cold glare of common sense, we received a chill as we pictured the teeming village upon the other side and compared it with our own strength.

"Three men against a thousand or so," I ventured to remark, after Templeton had mentioned the probable strength of the *kampong*.

"Numbers don't count," said Chico Morgan. "And every adventure that was ever planned was against common sense. Common sense is the kind of stuff that glues you to a ten-dollar-a-week job while others go out collecting spoil. Didn't you say that this blade would cause a revolution, Templeton?"

"I did," answered Red. "It will stir the East like a flame. This tribe of Kyans have no dealings with the sea Dyaks, or they would have known of its value years ago."

The sun touched the belt of jungle, and the last rays stained that morass the colour of blood. A

thin vapour seemed to rise from it as the heat of the day decreased, and those vapour shapes looked anything but reassuring to us. It would not take a vivid imagination to think of them as the ghosts of those who had been swallowed up in that quivering slough.

Templeton interrupted us in our contemplation of the rising vapours. He placed a big hand on each of our heads and pushed us forward so that we could peep through a hole which he had cut in the curtain of green.

"Look!" he whispered. "At the swamp! Look!"

Of all the extraordinary happenings that took place on that journey of journeys, none impressed me more than the sight which met our eyes at that moment. I don't know why. We witnessed occurrences that were more thrilling, but that one particular incident lives in my memory. It is an undigested happening which refuses to be brought down to the level of commonplace recollections by the acid of time.

Through the ghostly mists that were rising from the morass moved a human python, hundreds of feet in length. It was a column of natives that twisted in and out among the green mouths as it moved slowly toward the copper-coloured slopes on the far side of the quagmire.

"Over a thousand," muttered Red.

"Nearer two," said Chico. "What are they carrying?"

We stared at the bamboo poles which the leading four carried upon their shoulders, then, as if the knowledge had come to us at the same moment, we glanced into each other's faces.

"Suffering sinners!" gasped Templeton. "It is!"

Chico was bobbing his head as he counted slowly, then he moistened his lips before pronouncing the tally.

"Ten," he said quietly. "Gung must have escaped from them."

Red Templeton and I checked the trophies that were slung by pieces of rattan to the bamboos. There were only ten. One of the Dyaks or the Hindu had escaped the slaughter and had managed to save his headpiece from becoming a smoked ornament in the village in the copper-coloured hills.

The line manœuvred till our eyes grew dim in watching it. Very slowly the thousand or more naked warriors worked their way across the swamp, and as they got farther and farther away from our hiding-place, the vapours from the wet ground came up between us like a curtain, and through occasional breaks we watched with a strange fascination the

followers of the Spotted Panther go into the fast falling night.

That was a review that struck terror into us. The place seemed dead before we had sighted the human centipede moving across the swamp; now it seemed packed with life. We pictured the teeming village upon the other side as our fingers tightened on our revolvers and rifles, and the gurgling noise of the devilish morass came to our ears as if it mocked our efforts.

"I wouldn't care to cross that place in the dark," said Chico. "I hope when we're doing a retreat from the other side that we'll pick a nice day for the job."

"Let's hope we'll have a say as regards the time," muttered Templeton. "If I could turn round and go back I'd go, but by all that I hold sacred, I can't go! I must go on! I brought you two into this business, and if you want to turn around ——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Morgan. "We knew what kind of a game we were up against before we decided to come. And we're like you, we couldn't turn tail if we wanted to. That big Sword of Buddha is dancing before my eyes day and night. How is it with you, Lenford?"

"I'm in the same condition," I answered. "I want to see the sword."



Chico pulled a flask from his pocket and held it out to Red. "Drink to it," he said. "We'll get it or it will get us, and we won't grumble at fate whichever way the cards fall."

We drank the toast that Chico had given, and then we crouched in the darkness and waited. Morgan had told the truth when he said that the sword was continually before his eyes. It was before the eyes of the three of us. The Chalice of Everlasting Fire had appeared wonderful to us that night when we had seen it in Banjermassin, but the Great Parong of Buddha appeared a thousand times more wonderful as we thought of the stories which Templeton and Gung had told us concerning it. The big blade was the foundation of a thousand wonderful legends. With it, according to Hindu myth, Buddha had cut the stars of the heavens into their proper sizes before flinging them into space, and it is in the records of the Rock Temple of Udis that the great teacher had used the weapons to sever the flaming wire which the legions of sin had bound around the earth. If the exhibition of the sacred tooth of Gautama in the Temple of Kandy produced such unrest among the Singhalese that the English Government was forced to prohibit the Buddhist priests from exhibiting the relic, we wondered what frenzy of excitement would be produced when we carried the long-lost



sword from Borneo to the mainland, where millions were awaiting its reappearance.

A pale glow appeared upon the horizon, and we watched the morass. The moon was rising, and with the moon would come Nao, the Golden One, to guide us across the quivering plain that lay between us and the village.

"The capture of the Dyak carriers might make them suspicious to-night," whispered Templeton. "She might have a job to get away."

"She'll get away," muttered Chico.

"Let's hope so," I said. "I'm hungry for a look at the sword, but the way that pig disappeared has scared me off any attempt to make the trip without a guide."

The moon peeped above the jungle belt, and our eyes were fixed upon the morass as the ghostly light made it perceptible. Ten million frogs were croaking in that place. Their music went up into the night, and we wondered how the gentle headhunter could woo slumber with the racket at his front door.

"I hope they do this every evening," whispered Chico. "If it is a special uproar on account of some frog festival, it's likely to cause insomnia in the camp."

Chico Morgan possessed a fund of humour that prevented him from taking a pessimistic view of any

situation in which he might find himself, but the landscape that confronted us that evening was of a kind that would try the nerves of the most confirmed optimist in the world. Running like an undernote in the terrific frog chorus was the unholy grumbling and gurgling of the Million Mouths of Boorsh, and one could not keep the imagination from speculating on the slaughter that those mouths had accomplished.

"It's getting late," murmured Templeton. "I've been straining my eyes, but I can't see ——"

A slight noise in the bushes to the left made Templeton stop abruptly, and we listened attentively. The surrounding undergrowth offered fine possibilities for a sporting headhunter who might fire his little poisoned darts into our hiding-place or creep up close enough to get in a finishing stroke with a razor-edged parong.

The frogs took a slight intermission as frogs sometimes do when the leader of the bass is disturbed, and in that little intermission we heard a silvery voice whispering into the night. It whispered one word, and it repeated that word over and over again like a child learning a lesson.

"Leesbon! Leesbon! Leesbon!" Nao had caught the name of Lisbon when Chico had said that it was the place where she belonged, and she was using it as a countersign in making her way toward us.

## CHAPTER VII

### ONE-WHO-NEVER-SLEPT

OF THE thoughts of Morgan and Templeton as we put foot upon that morass I cannot write. They gave no outward sign that they experienced any thrill out of the common, and I am firmly convinced that if the world was canvassed to find two men who would face that place without betraying the slightest fear, no two could be found better qualified than Red and Chico. But of my own feelings I can speak authoritatively. As we followed Nao out upon the shaking crust on which the peculiar ulcerlike openings appeared at close intervals, my physical fear was such that I had, for the first time during the trip, a mad desire to thrust my craving for the sword from my mind and rush for the Barito.

I think Chico Morgan understood my feelings. He made as if he would follow Templeton, who walked next to the Golden One, but he changed his mind, and pushing me next to Red, he took the tail end of the procession.

"It takes me back to Vermont," he said. "Can't you imagine that you're testing the ice, and that you'll get a blamed good wetting if you flop through?"

"We'll get something more than a wetting if we break through this crust," I spluttered.

"But we won't break through," said Chico. "Don't you remember how we got into this deal? We went out for a stroll because we were mighty near crying for old Broadway, and now, Lenford, I feel we're going to get the treasure that will take us back in style."

Up and down on that flaky crust went Nao, and we followed her carefully. There were a dozen different routes across the place, but she assured Templeton that she was taking us by the easiest way, and the one which would best suit her plans when we reached the other side.

"Will there be any one at the end of the track?" asked Chico.

Red put the question and translated the girl's reply. "We will be received by a person called 'One-Who-Never-Slept,' " he said. "She says that she will explain everything before we get across, so I guess it is no use rushing her with inquiries."

The moon was blotted out by a pack of fat clouds when we were but halfway across the place, and as progress was impossible in a bad light we had to

stand still and wait till the heavy masses had rolled from the face of the orb. I cursed those slow-moving clouds during the enforced wait. The ground shivered at intervals, reminding one of the preliminary tremors of an earthquake, and that shivery feeling crawled into my system till my teeth chattered. To make the wait more terrifying the frogs ceased their uproar, and we waited in a silence that was broken only by the gurgling noise of the mouths that were all around us.

"It would be unlucky if a storm came up," whispered the irrepressible Chico. "We should have to camp here till morning, and then the Spotted Panther's lookout would pipe us off while we were scooting back to the other side."

A frog of enormous size hopped upon my shoe at that moment, and I understood the condition of my nerves by the shock which I experienced. The Million Mouths of Boorsh had made a heavy draught upon my courage.

The moon fought herself free of the cloud-wrack after what seemed an eternity, and Nao went forward slowly and carefully. To us there seemed no track upon the flaky surface of the place. We conjectured that any marks made upon the surface would be blotted out by the moisture, and we realized that the girl was finding her way

by mental pictures of the different mouths which we skirted.

The rocks of the other side loomed up in front of us at last, and my fears of death from suffocation in thick black mud were somewhat abated. I thought that death might await us in the *kampong* of the Spotted Panther, but a death of any other kind was preferable to a death in the middle of that morass.

A ridge of black rocks came up before us, and when we had reached these, the Golden One called a halt. We guessed from the manner in which the swamp stretched out on either side of the rocks that they formed an island in the sea of horrible mud, and our surmise proved correct.

We halted near a big boulder, and Nao proceeded to explain rapidly to Templeton the difficulties that lay immediately before us, and Red translated her words.

"On the other side of these rocks is a channel of mud dividing us from the shore," whispered Templeton, "and that is where the person that Nao calls 'One-Who-Never-Slept' is on guard."

"And how are we to get across the channel?" asked Chico.

The Golden One started to talk rapidly as if she understood Morgan's question. She was evidently



much excited, and, as she spoke, she put her two shapely arms above her head and made a movement that suggested an aerial swing. Morgan and I cursed our inability to grip the meaning of her words, and we waited anxiously for Templeton's version.

"Now we're getting into action," said Red. "According to her explanation there is a swinging rope across the little channel, but the guard on the other side controls the rope. When the right password comes from this side he lets the rope fly over to the signaller, and the visitor swings across. The fibre rope is tied to the limb of a tree that grows out over the channel from the side that the watcher is on."

Chico whistled softly and looked hard at Nao, who was studying the heavens as if interested in the fat clouds that seemed to be surrounding the white moon.

"And how are we to get Mr. Sleepless to pass us through?" asked Morgan.

A big cloud sprang upon the moon as Chico put the question, and the Golden One showed intense excitement as she turned toward Templeton.

"What's happened?" I questioned.

"The right moment has arrived," said Templeton. "She'll give the signal while the moon is under the



cloud, and, when the rope comes across, one of us must swing over the channel and stop old Never-Blink from making a noise."

Nao was moving across the rock at that moment, and, as we followed her, we began to think that her beautiful head contained sufficient gray matter to build a scheme or two. She had been waiting for that cloud pack to obscure the moon, and now she motioned us to hurry as she sped across the rocks.

"Who'll swing across?" I whispered.

"Leave it to her," answered Templeton. "Let her run this part of the business as she thinks fit."

Nao halted us behind a big rock and we waited in silence. From somewhere to the right came a nasal chant, but the clouds had so effectually smothered the moon that we could not see the singer. But we knew that we were close to the channel. The gurgling that we had missed while crossing the rocks was quite close to us now, and we understood that the person chanting the Malayan poem was the guardian of the swinging rope.

Nao touched Chico with her little hand, motioned to him to walk immediately behind her, then moving out upon a smooth platform of rock, she sent a hail across the river of mud.

The guard replied with a question which was evidently answered to his satisfaction, but it was

clear to us that he was in the habit of doing things in a methodical and leisurely fashion. And he did something at that moment that startled us exceedingly. With the evident intention of giving the Golden One sufficient light to enable her to swing across the channel in safety, he set fire to a huge torch of resin-wood, and we crouched as the light flashed across the mud.

Chico, who was standing behind Nao, immediately dropped upon his hands and knees, and with thumping hearts we watched the Dyak wave the torch above his head. If he discovered Morgan he would raise an alarm that would bring the village down upon us, and we cursed him as he stood and peered across at the girl. At that moment we saw the huge limb of the mohor tree that grew out over the channel, and the long rope of plaited fibre that hung from it, one end of which was tied loosely round a projection of rock at the side of the watchful sentinel.

"Damn him!" breathed Templeton.

Nao gave an impatient cry, and the One-Who-Never-Slept unwound the rope from the rocky projection. Holding the torch high above his head, he rolled the loose end into a ball, and jerked it across the channel.

The girl caught it deftly, and, raising her arms

above her head, stood for a moment as if preparing to jump. Never-Blink was watching as if he found enjoyment in noting the light of the torch flash upon the golden limbs of the girl, and we prayed that he would give his attention to something else so that Chico would get an opportunity to take the place of the maid.

But the sentinel showed no intention of heeding the mental suggestion which we tried to convey, and we waited breathlessly. Each moment we expected him to locate Chico and send a wild yell of warning into the night. Templeton was breathing in a manner that brought visions of an apoplectic seizure, and Nao was evidently upset by the keen scrutiny of the eyes upon the other side.

It was Red who relieved the tension. He understood that Morgan could not make an attempt while the light of the torch was upon the place where the girl was standing, and he realized that Nao might do something foolish if nothing were done to relieve the strain. Besides, the moon was pushing its way through the clouds that had covered her so opportunely. Templeton seized a piece of rock, and, rising upon his knees, he flung the missile at the torch-holder on the other side!

There was never a stone flung with such unerring aim. The rock hit the sentinel on the jaw, and his

thin legs crumpled beneath him. Still clinging to the torch, he made an effort to rise, but the effort only brought him into more trouble. Chico Morgan had sprung for the rope the moment Templeton's missile had struck the mark, and, as One-Who-Never-Slept attempted to rise, Chico's heavy shoes smashed against his chest and sent him backward. Never-Blink had lost his reputation at last.

Templeton followed Morgan when Chico flung back the rope, then the Golden One shot like a bird across the muddy channel, and I followed her. The moon was clear of the clouds, and we could see plainly the platform of rock that was worn smooth by the feet of the warriors of the Spotted Panther. Farther along the rocky bank there were half a dozen other ropes that were evidently put in use when the head-hunters were out in force, as we had seen them that afternoon as they made their way across the Million Mouths of Boorsh.

"We had luck," muttered Chico, as he gagged old Never-Blink. "That was a good idea of yours to crack his jaw with a rock."

"If it had missed we'd have been in a fix," said Red. "He'd have made enough row with this thing to wake the dead."

He pointed to a "bull-roarer," the strange wooden instrument used by some of the Kyan tribes to pro-

duce noise, and I blessed the accuracy of Red's aim. I shuddered as I contemplated a wild run across the gurgling morass with a thousand fleet-footed followers of the Panther on our trail. The thoughts of such a pursuit brought back pictures of the ten trophies which we had seen carried upon the bamboo poles at the head of the snaky line of warriors.

Chico finished his job of trussing up the half-stunned watchman, and then we stood in a circle and looked at each other. We had gained the shore, but we had formed no plan as to how we should proceed. Templeton and Morgan had fixed convictions that plans were only useful where there was no opposition, so we had wasted no thought upon what we should do at the village till we were certain that we would arrive there with our heads attached to our bodies.

A winding path led up a slight slope immediately in front of us, and at the top of the rise, we knew from the description furnished us by the Golden One, was the village.

"Ask her if she can guide us to the spot now," whispered Chico. "See if she knows the exact place where the sword is hidden?"

Templeton fired the questions at the girl swiftly, and she answered rapidly.

"She knows where it is hidden," said Red, "but she is doubtful if we can get in to-night."

"Why?" questioned Chico.

"It takes a hundred men to move the stone at the door of the cave. There is a crevice in the rock through which the sword could be seen by the people, but it was through the crevice that the Chalice of Everlasting Fire was stolen, and since then the Great Parong is removed out of the reach of thieves. She says if we could remove the stone slab we ——"

"But how the devil does she think we could move it?" interrupted Chico.

Templeton looked at the girl, whose glorious eyes were fixed on Morgan, then he spoke softly to Chico. "We must go quietly," he said. "She thinks that little obstructions are nothing to you. Do you understand? She has booked you up as a sort of demigod, and she tells me this little tale about the stone slab as if it made no difference to you."

Morgan's mouth opened, but no words escaped. He stared at Nao for a few moments, then he looked up the little shadowy path that zigzagged up the slope.

Red put a question and the girl answered, then he turned to Chico.

"The cave is open on the nights of the Blood Moon," he said quickly. "She doesn't know when



that will be. It depends on the moon and the brother of the Panther. Seven nights ago was the last time that the stone was rolled away."

"Glory be!" murmured Morgan. "Will you ask her where we can stow ourselves away to think about the situation."

"She knows a place," said Red. "She is willing to guarantee our safety, and I'm willing to trust her to the last."

"So am I," snapped Chico. "Tell me what to do with Never-Blink and I'll follow on."

We looked at the trussed Kyan on the rock, and the girl, as if she understood the matter under discussion, spoke rapidly to Red.

"What is it?" asked Morgan.

"She says," whispered Templeton, "that the White *Mias* has been known to cross the swamp and kill a sentinel. That is the reason why there is no bridge across this channel. She thinks if he fell into the mud that they would put the job at the door of the orang-utan legion."

The naïveté of the girl would have made us smile at any other time, but we were in no mood for laughter at that moment. There were a thousand dangers to be faced before we could put our eyes on the Great Sword of Buddha, and retreat was impossible now. We had to go on to the end, and as we stood



looking down at the sentinel a cold puff of air came across the gurgling morass, and I shivered as I thought of the mystery which surrounded us. Here in a backwater of time was a treasure of which four hundred million people dreamed as their ancestors had dreamed for centuries — centuries that had piled themselves one on top of another till the story of the Great Sword was adjudged a fable by Western investigators who had endeavoured to trace its history. But the Orient believed. Time matters nothing to the East, and if proof is not there — well, why worry?

Chico stooped suddenly and put his hand on the breast of the watchman.

“Wow!” he exclaimed. “He’s dead! Either the stone on the jaw or the collision with me, or perhaps his wounded pride, has sent him over the dark river. Well, it saves us from a very vexatious problem. I couldn’t think of tumbling a live man into this gurgling mass, but now it doesn’t matter much. Lend a hand, Lenford, and then we’ll go ahead.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SPOTTED PANTHER

**I**T IS the soul of a country that goes out across the seas and creates impressions. The dweller at the end of the world who has read little about America, England, France, Germany, or a score of other countries that we call clean and wholesome, senses their wholesomeness. It comes to him on the breeze. And that night as we crawled up the little path that led from the Mouths of Boorsh, we understood why Borneo had created an atmosphere of fear. A country is like a human being. We instinctively hate the low-browed ruffian before we exchange words with him, and in the same manner we sense a country of which we have read little. And we felt as we peered over the rise that we were looking at the real dark soul of Borneo which had made the land unattractive to people who had neither visited nor read of it.

"Body o' me!" whispered Chico. "What a sweet, little camp!"

Red Templeton swept his eyes over the place and

then glanced at the girl. The Golden One had lived in that village all her life, and as we looked at the *kampong*, and then at the sweet face of the girl, we thought of a violet growing in a pit of filth and darkness.

There is no other place in the world that could inspire the terror which seemed to well out from that village. We thought that the centuries had given it a devilish appearance, and that every deed of blood committed there hung above the place. Chico Morgan and Templeton were not of the imaginative kind, but in the first few minutes after we gained the rise and crouched to examine the village thoroughly before moving forward, I could see that both were impressed by the very essence of villainy which seemed to envelop the place.

"It's as pretty as a sleeping cobra," muttered Templeton. "Those holes in the rock look like tombs."

The village proper was built Dyak fashion. Seven long houses of bark and timber, covered with palm leaves that were sewn together and then tied to the rafters with palm fibre, stood in a row, but these houses, although they looked anything but inviting, were not responsible for the chill which the place gave to us. Immediately at the rear of the community houses was a cliff of copper-coloured

rock that rose to a great height, and it was this hill that attracted our attention. The face of the cliff was bored with hundreds of round holes, and it was evident that the followers of the Spotted Panther, either too lazy to build wooden houses, or thinking they were more secure from the attacks of enemies if they slept at a greater elevation, had scooped out sleeping quarters in the soft rock, and the entrances of these chambers appeared to us like so many blind eyes as we stared at them in the moonlight.

"It's a good job we stopped old Never-Blink from twirling that bull-roarer," said Chico. "If he had sprung an alarm they would have been on us like a thousand wolves."

Beyond the long family houses the jungle rose up again like a wall, and it was in this direction that Nao pointed as she answered the questions which Templeton put to her concerning the location of the Cave of the Blood Moon, where the treasure was secreted.

"She says that the cave is at the other end of the village," said Templeton. "We must circle around it through the jungle, and we've got to hurry. The moon will set in a few hours, and we must find a hiding-place."

With Nao leading, we circled the sleeping village, taking especial care to make a wide detour so that there would be no chance of stumbling upon a Dyak

warrior taking a moonlight stroll. The stillness of the place was amazing. A silence that was depressing hung above the long houses and the holes in the cliff, and we were surprised at hearing no sounds.

But the Golden One explained that the intense quiet was no proof that every villager was sleeping quietly.

"She says that they are scared out of their wits by the White *Mias*," explained Templeton. "They get into their holes the moment it is dark, and they won't come out till daybreak. Only the two guards, one at each end of the village, keep watch."

"And why isn't Nao afraid to be out?" asked Chico.

Templeton put a question regarding the girl's fear of the supposed queen of the orang-utans, but for a minute or so the Golden One walked on without making an answer. Presently she turned and touched Morgan upon the arm, and Red smiled as he translated her words.

"You saved her from the fellow with the blow-pipe, so she thinks you can save her from anything," he said.

"Leesbon," whispered the girl her big eyes shining as she looked at Chico.

"Lisbon it is," said Morgan. "When we get hold of this big sword you'll get a share that will make

you wealthy enough to buy the biggest castle in the whole of Portugal."

Nao smiled like a child as we slipped rapidly through the jungle. The Lord alone knows what a procession of thoughts streamed through her brain from the moment we had met her that morning at the moss-covered cross in the jungle. It seemed a year to us as we circled the *kampong*, but it must have seemed a decade to the Golden One. She had told Templeton that her father and mother were both dead, and that the only two who conversed with her in the Portuguese tongue were two old women who were supposed to be her aunts. There were others in the village who understood the language, but it was against the wish of the Spotted Panther for it to be spoken, and when she did use it in addressing the two old dames, Nao took care that no one would overhear the conversation.

We came out upon a small clearing at the west side of the village, which was the end farthest away from the morass, and the girl stopped. Holding up her finger as a warning lest we might make a noise that would alarm the sentinel at that end of the *kampong*, she crossed the clearing, and stopped before a stone cliff that seemed part of the same ridge into which the Orang Bukkit had burrowed for sleeping places.



“Why — what ——” muttered Templeton.  
“What is ——”

He saw then, and we saw, too. The shadow of the trees had fallen upon the stone wall, and for the moment we had not seen the slab. We were in front of the Cave of the Blood Moon in which the Parong of Buddha and many other things that we knew not of were secreted!

I know that we forgot the stories which we had heard about the Spotted Panther in the minutes that immediately followed. We forgot the village with its hundreds of savage warriors. We forgot the ten heads which we had seen carried across the swamp, we forgot everything but the treasure which was so near to us. Gung had told the truth. We knew he had, but the proof that was before us brought upon us a mental excitement that amounted to a delirium. Up before our eyes sprang a picture of the waiting Orient — the ever patient, ever waiting Orient — and we felt inclined to shout as we realized that we were within grasping distance of the thing which the East had waited for centuries to behold.

And strange as it may appear now that I set it down here in words, we seemed to feel that the big Sword felt our presence and responded to it. This seems an insane statement, but it must be written. Perhaps the concentrated thought of millions may have



had something to do with it. I cannot explain the feeling, but I do know that Templeton, Morgan, and I felt that something that throbbed with life itself was waiting within that place for us to liberate it. Like the Chalice of Everlasting Fire, one could think of that Sword as being charged with life. For centuries it had been the hub around which the thoughts of all good Buddhists had constantly revolved, and if the power of thought was capable of doing anything at all, those two articles which the buccaneer, Enrique de Gama, had attempted to carry into the Western World were surely something more than mere metal and precious stones.

Chico Morgan was insane at that moment. He clutched the great slab of stone — the slab that the Golden One had informed us was so heavy that it took one hundred men to move it from the mouth of the cave — and he pulled at it with straining muscles.

“Lend a hand!” he growled.

“It’s useless,” protested Red. “We couldn’t move it.”

“Try,” gasped Chico. “I think I moved it a trifle!”

Templeton and I put our shoulders against the stone, but we had as much chance of moving it as an ox team would have of pulling the Khas Mahal at

Agra. The great slab of stone was fitted into a trench cut in the rock, and it was only by means of ropes and an immense amount of energy that it could be moved.

Nao had watched Chico without the slightest protest against his mad attack upon the slab. Her faith in Morgan was immense. As the big American tugged fiercely at the stone she had gazed at it in a manner that told Templeton and me that she would not have been surprised if Chico had moved it, although she had asserted that it took one hundred warriors to move the block when the cave was entered at irregular intervals.

Morgan stopped struggling, kicked the slab with his shoe and turned to Templeton.

"Ask her where the crevice is!" he cried. "Quick! The moon is going!"

Red put the question, and Nao led us quickly to the crack in the wall of the cave through which Gung and Courtney had stolen the Chalice of Everlasting Fire. The fissure was caused by a disruption of the strata, and although it was five or six feet in length, it was not more than eight inches in width at its widest point. Why the wonderful cup had been exposed near the opening was something that we had not been able to fathom, but as Chico thrust his hand into the crevice, Nao immediately

connected the movement with the loss of the Vessel of Flame.

"She says there is no hope of reaching anything that way," said Red. "Courtney and Gung must have had a streak of luck from what she relates. The Cup was left out after the door was shut, and it was thrust in through the crevice for the time being."

Chico gave up his search in disgust, and, much chagrined, the three of us stood back and looked at the treasure vault.

"If I had a plug of dynamite I'd blow the front out of it," growled Morgan, "and I'd take a chance of getting away from the bunch that are around the quarters."

"Dynamite would be no good," said Templeton. "We must use tact. We must watch and wait. We can do nothing to-night, so we had better let Nao show us to the hiding-place she knows of."

"I hate to leave this spot for a minute," said Chico. "I hope the hiding-place is handy!"

The Golden One turned as Templeton explained that we could do nothing more that evening, but she had not taken a dozen steps when she stopped and leaned forward. Her ears, keener than ours, had caught the sound of footsteps, and we wriggled into the velvety shadow of the rocky wall as the sounds became more distinct. The night prowler

was coming toward the big stone slab, and the girl stepped quickly into the shadows beside us. We surmised that it was one of the sentinels making a round of the village, and we waited patiently.

The soft footfalls came from the edge of the clearing, and we stopped breathing. Thoughts of the racket which the bull-roarer could fling into the silent night welled up in our minds, and we prayed that the invisible watcher would come close enough to give us a chance to spring upon him before he had an opportunity at whirling the devilish wooden noise-maker around his head.

But it was not the watchman who was approaching. Out of the shadows at the edge of the open space stepped a man who was more muscular than any man we had ever seen, and we knew immediately who he was. We had formed a mental picture of one man, and that one had appeared suddenly before us. The bark-cloth mask that covered the face that could not be looked upon by his followers told us that the prowler on the clearing was no other than the Spotted Panther!

Afterward when we compared notes we wondered if the faint light of the setting moon had made him appear larger than he really was, but we finally came to the conclusion that he was the biggest man we had ever seen. And he was. Standing there on the

clearing he seemed a giant, and the mask that fell down over his bare shoulders and breast made his figure more awe-inspiring. Fully six feet four in height, he had a chest that made us gasp as we looked at him, while the huge muscles of the legs and arms suggested a strength that made all our notions of thews and sinews topple to the ground. Red Templeton and Morgan were men much stronger than the ordinary, but Red and Chico were small in comparison with that savage. He was a primitive brute, and we had no need to wonder why the Trings and the Modangs mentioned his name with bated breath.

For fully three minutes he stood looking at the stone slab, then he turned and walked toward the *kampong*, leaving us amazed at his tremendous size.

"Shades of Goliath!" whispered Templeton. "He's the biggest brute I ever saw!"

"I'm sorry we didn't spring on him while we had the chance," said Chico. "He gave me a chill, and I've got a notion that he'll make our little job a hard one."

Nao led us through a clump of nipa-palm, turned and scaled a rather steep path at the rear of the cave, and then, crawling cautiously along a narrow ledge of rock, she stopped in front of one of the blind eyes in the face of the cliff and whispered to Templeton.

"This is our burrow," said Red. "By the whiskers of Mahomet! this little girl is good to us! She says that no one will come near this hole because it is supposed to be inhabited by an *aintu*, or spirit, and that in preparation of our coming, she put water and rice inside the place this afternoon."

Chico Morgan took the girl's little hand and carried it to his lips, then she turned quietly and ran along the ledge. As we crawled into the hole in the face of the cliff one word floated back to us through the soft night. The word was "Leesbon."



## CHAPTER IX

### THE POISONED DART

**I**F NAO had not informed us that our cave was shunned because it was supposed to be the abode of an evil spirit we might have wrongly attributed its desertion to the odour that came to our nostrils the moment we were inside the round opening.

"Easy," whispered Chico; "we might upset the water or step on the dish of 'paddy.' I'm certain that she must have pushed them through the opening without venturing inside. If she had sniffed this stench she would have hunted up better quarters for us."

"My!" growled Templeton. "I'm thinking the spirit must have committed suicide. Have you found the rice?"

"I've got the water," said Chico. "It is in these notches of bamboo near the opening."

I found the "paddy" wrapped in palm leaves beside the bamboo water vessels, and after we had unloaded the small packs of needful things which



we had carried from the Place of Evil Winds, we started to explore the cave in an endeavour to discover the cause of the vile odour which nearly choked us.

On hand, and knees we crept over the place without making a discovery. The floor was smooth and unbroken except for a small hole in one corner where the moisture percolating through the roof had eaten into the soft limestone of the floor.

"Feel the sides and roof," ordered Templeton. "P'raps the *aintu* has hanged himself from the ceiling."

It was impossible to stand upright, as the arched roof was not more than five feet from the floor at its highest elevation, so we stumbled around with our backs bent in an effort to locate the stench.

"I have it," whispered Morgan.

"What is it?" asked Red.

"Heads."

"What?"

"A parcel of heads. They're tied up neatly with rattan and strung along from two projections of rock."

We felt our way back to the spot where Chico was standing, and very cautiously we touched the string of trophies. There were nine, all dry and withered to the touch, and it was evident that some

brave warrior, after a successful headhunting raid upon the Trings and Modangs, had endeavoured to appease the evil spirit of the cave by presenting it with a number of trophies.

Chico untied the ghastly mementoes and carried them to the opening with the intention of firing them out into the night, but Templeton stopped him.

"Don't throw them out," he said.

"Why?" asked Morgan.

"Because they will be picked up, and that might lead to a search. We're taking a big risk in camping in this place, and we don't want to increase the danger."

"But where are we to put them?" queried Chico.

"Keep them here," snapped Red. "We're too close to the prize to take a risk."

Morgan put the string of skulls in the farthest corner, and we squatted on the floor near the round opening and wondered how the Dyaks could endure the odour of the trophies that they suspended over their fireplaces.

"Two of us had better sleep while one stays on guard," said Templeton. "You two take a nap while I watch."

"I can't sleep while that smell is around," grumbled Chico. "Say, I wonder could I drop them down that hole in the corner?"

"Where does it lead?"

"I don't know. It's just a hole worn by the water in the rock. If we could push them down there I could stick some palm leaves on top of them."

"Try," said Red.

Chico pushed the trophies into the hole one after the other, and when they went rolling away we felt inclined to dance with joy. Morgan stuffed the hole with some of the palm leaves that had been wrapped round the rice, and then we stretched ourselves on the floor while Red kept guard at the opening.

I was awakened out of a dream in which I thought I was watching Buddha swinging that big parong around his head so quickly that only a circle of flame could be seen, and I crawled hurriedly to the opening to see what was creating the uproar that shattered the silence of the dawn. It was an infamous noise. Chico and Red were on their knees near the circular opening listening to the racket, and I put a question with my mouth close to Templeton's ear.

"What is it?" I asked.

Red shouted his answer. "The bull-roarer," he cried. "They've discovered that old Never-Blink is off his post, and they're sounding an alarm."

It is possible that there are some instruments that will produce a greater volume of sound than the one which was used that morning in the village of the Spotted Panther, but I'll stake my life that no other instrument could produce such a devilish clatter. That noise could not be produced by civilized man, It was the poison of barbarism turned into sound. The war drums of the Aztecs, the skin pipes of the Papuans, and every other species of noise-making instrument was completely outclassed by the machine used in the Orang Bukkit village near the Mouths of Boorsh.

"Shades of Washington!" cried Morgan. "If he had sprung that thing last night I wouldn't have been able to run. That takes the strength out of my limbs."

That was how Templeton and I felt about that devilish sound. It seemed to sap the strength from our legs and arms, and I suppose it was the aim of the inventor to produce a noise that would have that power. That infernal racket seemed to bore into our brain and stir all the terror that was associated with noise. We seemed to know that our ancestors in the time when the mammoth was at large were defeated by a tribe whose drums produced the same kind of weird music. That is how we felt. While the sound of that thing was

buzzing in the air like the wings of ten million death beetles, I seemed to know of every fight that my forefathers had participated in, at least I knew of the losing fights. That noise was associated with defeat — defeat for those who listened to it.

The three of us looked at each other as the noise continued. There was an undercurrent of sound that we knew was caused by the village rousing itself to find out the cause of the alarm, but the dull, deafening boom seemed to smother the minor racket. It swelled into a terrific thunder, the air throbbing with the clangour, then it stopped suddenly, and a silence that had all the horror of the noise swept over the long houses and the caves.

“Gee!” breathed Morgan. “I never heard a noise like that in all my life, and I never knew a silence like this, either.”

The sun hadn’t risen when the bull-roarer stopped, and the silence that always comes with a tropical dawn was made more noticeable when the racket ceased so suddenly. We couldn’t see any of the natives because we were careful not to thrust our heads out of the hole, but we had a curious feeling that the whole camp had jumped into the morass. For promoting a creepy feeling it would be hard to discover a more effective method than the alternate intervals of appalling noise and silence.

"What has happened?" muttered Templeton. "They've either bolted from the place or else they've gone to sleep again."

"They wouldn't go to sleep again if they've discovered that the sentinel has left his beat," said Chico. "I think they have rushed down to the channel to investigate the disappearance. I wonder if Nao is with them?"

The unbroken silence made us feel certain that the whole village had gone down to the side of the morass, and as we felt safe from observation for the moment, Templeton thrust his head warily out of the hole and took a peep at the landscape.

"I can't see a soul," he whispered. "The houses are deserted, and there — Great Scott! here comes the Golden One!"

Red drew back his head, grabbed his rifle and peered out again.

"She's hurrying around by the cave," he muttered hoarsely. "I can't see her now! Yes, I can! She's coming here, and she's running like the mischief!"

I wished that I was far away from the *kampong* of the Spotted Panther at that moment. The infamous noise made by the bull-roarer, the silence which immediately followed it, and the information that Nao was running toward our hiding-place



brought a feeling of dread to me that I have never experienced at any other moment. That was an eerie dawn! I tried to stiffen my spine by picturing the Great Sword, but my teeth chattered in spite of all my efforts. For a few seconds I entertained a profound hate for the millions whose love for the wonderful weapon had made us so rash in our efforts to possess it.

"Let me look out!" cried Chico. "The beggars must have got news of us, and she's coming to warn us."

I don't know how we accomplished it, but the three of us managed to thrust our heads into the entrance hole when the Golden One ran along the narrow ledge and gasped a few words to Red as she dashed past like a beautiful nymph of the dawn. She was wise enough not to stop for an instant lest some one might have been watching, and before Templeton had delivered the message to us she was down the other side of the cliff and out of sight.

"What is wrong?" I cried. "What did she say?"

"They're after us," said Templeton. "She says they're on the right scent. They've got a hound—a human hound, she says."

"What?" asked Morgan.

"I don't know what the devil she means! She said a man-hound."



"That's nice," remarked Chico. "We had better prepare for a fight. If they've got a human bloodhound on the premises he's liable to locate us."

Morgan never understood the meaning of the word fear. He took a handful of rice and munched it contentedly while we waited for something to happen, and the grinding of his teeth got on the big Britisher's nerves.

"Stop chewing!" growled Templeton. "You're the only one in a fifty miles radius that's making a noise."

"This rice is good," said Chico. "Like — Geewhillikins! here they come!"

Years before that morning I had read a story that described the feelings of a runaway slave who crouched in the bushes and watched the bloodhounds sweep down upon him, and that story came into my mind as Chico Morgan motioned toward the point in the jungle where we had entered the clearing on the previous evening. There was a bloodhound upon our track at that moment, but as the Golden One had informed us in her hasty message, it was a human bloodhound. It made our blood curdle as we watched the head of the procession. We were being run down by a man, who ran on all fours, and whose face was thrust close to the ground as he followed our track unerringly!

That was a fear-inspiring spectacle. For months afterward I dreamed of that affair. I would awaken in the night, my body covered with the cold perspiration of terror, my brain obsessed with the belief that I was again a fugitive from the dwarfed and doglike creature that crawled on to the clearing at the head of the Spotted Panther's warriors.

"Good God!" muttered Templeton. "He's following every step we took."

Perhaps there was nothing so remarkable in the work which that twisted savage performed. The Australian aboriginal can run for miles upon a trail, and for his ability as a tracker is hired by the government to assist the police in lawless districts, but the aboriginal does not exhibit the doglike characteristics we saw displayed by the half-crippled Kyan. He really did appear to be following our tracks by the aid of his nose and not by his eyes. It was that peculiarity that sickened us. It made us feel qualmish as we peered down upon the packed mass that followed the man-dog.

The ugly cripple, evidently tired from his efforts in following the route by which we had circled the camp, stopped in the middle of the clearing to rest himself, and we had a good opportunity of viewing him as well as the crowd that surged behind. The tracker was horribly deformed, his face was

flat and beastlike, while his twisted arms and legs were fearfully emaciated. While resting he sat upon his haunches like a wallaby, and he whined in a manner that made Chico curse him softly.

Close beside the deformed one was the Spotted Panther, his face and neck still hidden by the bark-cloth mask, and next to the Panther, and apparently second in command, was another tremendous savage. Though not as tall as the chief, he was broader and more muscular, and as they stood together we thought that we had never seen two brown men who were their equal in stature. Behind these two were packed hundreds of naked warriors, all armed with parongs, spears, or sumpitans, the latter being the deadly blowpipe which the Kyan uses with such skill.

The sight fascinated us. The whining savage on his haunches was a deformed Nemesis on our trail, and as we watched him, our imagination scooped the climax of the situation out of the future and held it up before our eyes. The brute would lead the throng up the path by which we had reached the cave, and if we did manage to kill a few score of the party, our fate was plain.

Chico Morgan pushed forward the barrel of the rifle and looked hungrily at the whining cripple. But there was no salvation in shooting the brute

where he sat. Instead of delaying the onslaught it would bring the mob upon us with a rush.

The dog-man glanced up at the Panther, and the latter gave a signal to continue the chase, and at that moment I made a little discovery. It was a curious discovery to make at that moment. As the mob swayed forward, the big hand of the Englishman was thrust into the bosom of his khaki shirt, and as it was withdrawn I caught a glimpse of the face of the girl upon the little locket that he held for a second to the light. It was the face of Evelyn Courtney, the beautiful sister of the opium smoker whose rescue from the opium den had been the means of bringing Templeton and Morgan together.

The cripple, moving very slowly and still whining dreadfully, crept across the clearing on the path we had taken in approaching the great slab of stone. Here he stopped and sniffed for quite a time, looking up at the Panther at occasional intervals as if he wished to show that person that we had consumed some time upon the spot he then occupied.

"It looks as if he had been watching us," whispered Chico. "If the brute was prowling round last night it will be all up with the Golden One after they finish with us. Don't let that thing escape when they rush on us. Do you hear? If

we finish him we might save Nao from the vengeance of the devils!"

Templeton and I nodded to signify that we had the same anxiety to cut short the career of the cripple the moment we felt certain that he had located our hiding-place, and then we held our breath and watched the performance. We had no doubt about the deformed one's knowledge. Whether he had watched us from the trees, or whether he was possessed of some doglike instinct that enabled him to trace us, we couldn't tell, but his trailing was accurate.

"We're up against it," muttered Red. "Pick off the leaders when they're coming up the hill. If we scare them off, we might have a chance."

The whining cripple was dragging himself along the path by which Nao had led us when Morgan asked to see the crevice that had given Gung an opportunity to secure the Chalice of Everlasting Fire, and we gave up the hope we cherished that he would lose our trail. In another minute he would be hidden from view by the clump of screw-palm, and we knew that we would not see him again till he led the naked mob up the slope immediately in front of our cave. The fact that the wicked spirits had laid a claim upon our hiding-place would not save us when the deformed savage pointed it

out as the spot where the assailants of old Never-Blink were hidden.

"It's all up," growled Chico.

"I guess it is," assented Templeton. "If the brute —— Hello! what's happened?"

Morgan thrust his head out of the hole as the cripple reeled and fell, but Templeton grabbed Chico by the shoulders and pulled him back.

"Don't show yourself!" cried Red. "We've got a chance!"

"What hit him?" gasped Chico.

"A poisoned dart," answered Templeton. "Some one hiding in the bushes has picked him off with a sumpitan. Don't put your head out, you fool! Keep quiet! There's a hope that the bloodhound has been put out of business."



## CHAPTER X

### WE SEE THE MOON OF BLOOD

**I**N THE minutes that passed after the deformed savage had received the poisoned dart we sat wedged together near the mouth of the cave. We couldn't speak. A knowledge that came to the three of us at the same moment made our throats dry and our tongues refused to form the words we wished to utter. From out of the creeper growth that hemmed in the clearing a dart of death had gone swiftly and silently to the creature that was bringing a thousand armed men to our hiding-place, and we had no desire to question each other concerning the identity of the person who had used the deadly sumpitan. The words "*Nos somos amigos*," which Nao had uttered at the little moss-grown cross in the jungle, had not been lightly said. We understood at that moment that the Golden One, half delirious with the dreams which our coming had brought into her mind, had no hesitation in proving her friendship when the moment had arrived.



The happening threw the mob into a momentary panic. Their nerves were keyed up by the possibility of coming face to face with the persons who had caused the disappearance of the sentinel, and the manner in which the guide had been stricken nearly produced a stampede.

The Spotted Panther screamed out orders when he understood what had happened to his tracker, and the warriors sprang for the surrounding trees. The mysterious shot suggested a Tring ambushade, and with loud yells the mob rushed the encircling undergrowth.

The movement brought Chico to his feet. With a muttered curse he grabbed his rifle and made an effort to get out of the cave, but Templeton's big hands seized him before he had his shoulders through the opening.

"Stay where you are," cried the Englishman. "Sit quiet, you madman!"

"But they'll get her!" gasped Chico. "She must be in the bushes!"

"Do you think she'll wait for them?" growled Red. "She got away while the fools were wondering where the dart came from! Do you want to spoil her work?"

Chico grumbled as he flung himself flat upon the floor and drew a bead on the Spotted Panther,

who was shouting in the middle of the clearing. Templeton's logic appealed to Morgan, but he was determined to have a speedy revenge if the retreat of the user of the deadly blowpipe had been cut off.

The crippled tracker was lying upon his face while another savage was busily engaged plastering the wound with blue mud. But it appeared as if the crude skill of the medicine man was of little avail. The whining of the wounded man grew weaker and weaker, and when it ceased altogether the blue-mud practitioner turned his patient upon his back and made a grimace that spoke volumes.

"He's done his last bit of tracking," whispered Templeton.

"And the brown devils haven't located any one," grinned Chico. "Gee! what a row!"

The warriors were trooping back on to the clearing, their gestures plainly indicating that they had discovered nothing that would explain the matter, and the noise increased as the surprise caused by the mysterious shot passed away. A thousand tongues gave vent to a thousand different opinions, while the Panther and his big lieutenant cried orders. Single messengers were sent running in different directions, then, as if a signal had been received by some invisible means, the Panther turned into the jungle, and his thousand

followers, hushed into silence, followed upon his heels.

With noiseless feet they filed away toward the west, and we watched them in surprise. In five minutes the clearing was deserted, even the mud doctor bolting hurriedly from the body of the cripple that lay in the middle of the grassy place.

"What happened to them?" asked Red.

"Search me," said Chico. "They've taken a notion to go somewhere in a hurry."

The sun crept over the belt of sandalwood, teak, and kaladang trees, and in the intense quiet of the tropic morning we watched and waited for the return of the brigade. Our own position was not a comfortable one during that long wait. The heat in the little cave was intense, and our nearness to the treasure maddened us as we thought over a thousand insane ways of moving the great slab of stone from the entrance. Once or twice during the long hours of the morning Templeton had a task to restrain Chico from slipping down the bank and attacking the slab with the limb of a tree as the lever.

"We might lever it back so that one of us could crawl behind it," grumbled Chico. "It's enough to drive a man crazy to sit here and look at it."

"That's all we can do for the present," counselled

Red. "We've had a lump of luck to start the day with, and we don't want to run a risk for nothing."

"But I seem to see the thing through the rock," muttered Chico. "I feel it, too! Don't you fellows feel it?"

We nodded our heads as we stared down at the big slab that barred our way to power and fortune. We felt the nearness of that Sword in a way that I cannot explain. We might not have had that peculiar feeling in any other atmosphere, and it is hard to describe it to a person who does not know the Orient. But we felt that the Great Parong of Buddha knew that we were near. The heat and the silence might have affected us that morning so that we were peculiarly susceptible to outside influence, while the incident of the dog-man left our nerves as taut as an E string. And the strange scents in the air made us feel as if we were as old as the shrivelled claw in the Durga Kund. As we lay in that little cave and soaked in the odours that came to us from the jungle and the mudbanks, we shouldn't have shown any surprise if we had seen a full-grown mastodon or iron-scaled glyptodon go strolling across the landscape. We felt that we belonged to the age of the mammoth and the hairy auroch, and the Winchester that Morgan held in his hand seemed altogether out of place. I'll

wager that we could have handled a spear or a razor-edged parong as well as any Malay that morning.

"The smell of that infernal morass makes me feel like a wild man," muttered Templeton. "If I were in this country for three months I'd be wearing a loin cloth and eating yams and paddy like a full-blooded Kyan."

"Same here," said Chico. "If we wait in this cave for three days there'll only be a scrap of tissue paper between me and a headhunter."

Noon brought a little break in the monotony. Two very old savages came from the community houses and dragged the body of the dead tracker in the direction of the Mouths of Boorsh, and ten minutes after they had disappeared Nao walked slowly across the clearing, turned when she reached the jungle, and then walked back again toward the village. Not once during the promenade did she look in the direction of our hiding-place, but we understood the motive that prompted her to take the stroll. Her intuition told her that we would be alarmed over her safety, yet she could not muster up enough courage to walk through the clearing while the body of the deformed savage was lying there.

We watched her without speaking as she walked

slowly by, and if we had thought her a wonder woman on the day she approached the cross, we were a thousand times more convinced of her beauty at that moment. Helen might have looked like that when she walked upon the ramparts of Troy and watched the armed warriors on the plain, and the wood nymphs that played upon the slopes of Hymettus never stepped more daintily than the Golden One as she moved beneath our hiding-place.

"Gee! she's something good to look at," muttered Chico, after she disappeared. "Her little feet didn't seem to touch the grass."

Templeton smiled. "It must have been our big feet that left the tracks for the whining brute," he said. "We should practise that floating movement before we try to get back over the morass."

Morgan didn't answer, and once again the silence that seemed to be intensified by the heat and the odours of black mud and decaying leaves closed in upon the place. We lay for hours without speaking, our eyes fixed upon the big stone slab that held us fascinated. And we dreamed a thousand dreams during that hot afternoon. Once Templeton forgot himself in thinking of that sword, and chanted aloud a verse which Gung, the Hindu,



had asserted was inlaid in gold upon the blade of the weapon. Gung's translation ran:

"I, who have parted the planets,  
I, who have laid down the Law,  
Bounded the seas and the oceans,  
Counted the sands on each shore,  
Hurled up the mountains that whisper  
A litany sweet to the sun,  
Here tell to my faithful the watchword  
By which all my wonders are done.  
Ocean, and sea, and swift river,  
Mountain, volcano, and hill,  
Slow-circling planets and star dust—  
With *Faith* I can build them at will."

And we were not surprised at hearing Templeton chanting that verse. Even when he raised his voice a little louder than what we thought was safe under the circumstances, we did not protest. We wanted him to chant it in a loud tone. Chico and I wanted him to. We were so affected by the jungle, and the odours, and our nearness to the Great Parong that we thought that the big Sword might understand that we had come to take it out of that place. Now that I have written this down it seems as if I have given the reader grounds to doubt our sanity at that particular time, but we were not insane. Our minds were flooded with a million thoughts that came from out the backs



of our brains, and we thrilled with the knowledge that Gung's stories had unloosed within our own minds. It was extraordinary.

Chico Morgan looked at Templeton searchingly, then he looked at me. "It is five feet three inches in length," he said quietly.

"And inlaid with gold on both sides of the blade," I said.

"And the hilt is a twisted cobra in gold holding the big emerald handle in its mouth," murmured Templeton. Then, after a slight pause, he added: "And it would take a strong man to swing it with his two hands."

Chico peered out upon the clearing, where the shadows of the sandalwood and teak trees stole across the grass toward the big stone slab as if curious to know what was concealed within the cave, then he turned suddenly upon Templeton and me.

"Who told us about the size and look of the Sword?" he asked.

"Did Gung tell us?" queried Templeton, looking at me.

"No," I answered. "He told us of its history and the verse you chanted, but he didn't know the size of it. He only knew that the handle was a big emerald."

"We must have dreamed about the other things," said Red, speaking slowly, "although I'm sure that the hilt is a knotted cobra in gold that is twined like the figure eight."

"And I'm certain about its length," muttered Chico. "I'll swear it is five feet three inches in length."

No one spoke after that. We just lay there watching the shadows close in and wondering about the thoughts that filled our brains.

The sun slipped hurriedly down through a sky that looked as if it were a testing cloth for Hamud Way, the Magic Dyer of Samarkhand, and then the swift tropical night wiped the colours out with a brush of darkness.

"I guess they'll come back by the morass," whispered Templeton. "They came that way last evening."

"They might have come back hours ago!" said Chico. "For all we know the devils might have hidden themselves in the jungle at the other side of the clearing. I believe they are there. Perhaps that is why Nao would not look in our direction as she walked by."

We strained our ears to catch the noises of the night as we waited. We felt certain that Nao would bring a message to us under cover of the darkness, and we listened for the slightest sound.

Perhaps it was our eagerness to hear the sound of Nao's little feet upon the slope that made us blind to other things. It was the bull-roarer that awakened us. That infernal noise-making instrument again shattered the silence and we listened with the peculiar feeling of dread which had come to us that morning.

"What is up now?" questioned Red.

"P'raps they're bringing out another bloodhound," answered Chico. "If they do,—— Look! Look!"

It was strange that we didn't notice anything till Morgan gave the cry of wonder. It is more than strange. We were so busy listening that we had no use for our eyes, and the wonder of wonders was happening for us at that moment. As Chico uttered the cry we jerked our heads forward and looked. Looked is an empty word to express what we did! We thrust our heads out toward the south and stared and stared and stared! We made gurgling sounds. We became drunk with a wild joy that surged up within us. Rising over the trees, the rim showing above the league-wide stretch of jungle like the red eye of a dream ogre, was the moon. *A red moon!* The vapours rising from the jungle seemed to wrap it till its face appeared to be covered with a piece of purple chiffon,

and as the bull-roarer set the air vibrating we gave a joint cry of joy.

“The Moon of Blood!” we repeated over and over again. “The Moon of Blood! The Moon of Blood!”

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GREAT PARONG

**WE** COULD well imagine how that constantly recurring phenomenon startled the savages. That the moon which ordinarily rose with a face as white as the chalk cliffs of Sald should change that face to one of crimson suggested to the minds of the Panther's followers that something was amiss. They did not realize how the enveloping haze which rose from the Mouths of Boorsh veiled the moon while it hung low upon the horizon. The red orb suggested anger, and they had looked around for some means of appeasing that anger. The genius of the place had evidently suggested that the Great Parong of Buddha be shown to the angry goddess of the night, and a tribal ceremony was immediately introduced. The moon had become white as it rose above the haze, and the genius who suggested the bringing forth of the big blade received the plaudits of the mob. In all probability he was appointed bearer of the sword

with special perquisites in the way of boar fat and tender yams.

The bull-roarer flung out waves of sound that one pictured as projectiles of concentrated noise flying out over the grenadierlike trees. The cliff seemed to tremble with the infernal uproar. It rolled over us in a deafening volume, and to add to the clamour, the savages made a booming noise with their mouths as they rushed toward the treasure cave.

Chico tightened his belt and gripped his rifle. The moment that we had dreamed of was at hand. Our hearts pounded madly with excitement, and I know that the blood surged through my head in a way that made me think that I should be the victim of an apoplectic seizure if the bull-roarer did not cease.

"What will be our plans?" cried Morgan. "Is there anything special to do?"

"We must trust to our luck," answered Templeton. "We don't know what opportunity will turn up. Do nothing foolish, and stick together."

The clearing was black with screaming, fighting men at that moment. The place was still in the shadow of the trees, and we blessed the fact as we crawled through the mouth of the cave and wriggled like rock snakes along the ledge. No adventure

that was ever written of was like that adventure. We were certain of that as we wormed our way forward. And we were as old as the jungle! All the tricks of the cave men came to us as we went slowly down the slope, and I know that my own fingers longed for the feel of a flint axe that could drive its way "through brawn and brain," and for which I would have gladly exchanged the revolver I clutched tightly.

A man can shed the husk of civilization in a moment. Templeton, Morgan, and I flung off the veneer that evening. It was a miracle. I know that we were one with our ancestors of the Paleozoic Age, and our fighting rules were the same as those whose bones turn up in the Cambrian Beds. We, too, could have fought over the gristle of the mammoth or howled a challenge into the night wind. The change terrified us in a way, and yet it thrilled us. We were as primitive as the naked savages whose wild cries came up to us on the strange little puffs of air that came from the jungle.

Chico led the way, Templeton followed, and I brought up the rear. And Chico moved swiftly. Down below us came the grunting of fivescore men struggling with the tremendous slab of stone. There was the noise of crunching rock, and above all the hoarse shouts of the Spotted Panther.



Chico stopped for a moment, but Red urged him forward. The Englishman was a madman just then.

"Go on!" he whispered. "Don't stop! Keep moving!"

We crept past the creeper masses and the clumps of screw-palm, and the desire to possess the Sword became an agony to us. Our souls cried out for it, and our hands clutched convulsively at the darkness where our crazy imaginations flung up pictures of the thing.

A yell went up from the mob at the door of the cavern, and we knew that the big slab had been pulled aside. We pictured that crowd swarming into the cave to lay their hands upon the Great Sword of Buddha.

"Go on!" snarled Templeton. "Don't stop!"

We had passed the crevice in the cave wall then, and the dark flank of the struggling natives was only a few yards away.

"Wait a moment!" whispered Chico. "You'll be torn to pieces if you rush them!"

We halted, panting and perspiring, and the mob in front struggled like beasts. At last, over the yells and screams, came the roar of the Panther, and looking with eyes that had cat's vision through the very intensity of our longing to see, we had our first glimpse of the Sword.

The Panther carried it. High up over the black mass of bodies its big blade licked at a moonbeam that came through the trees to meet it, and we wept with joy and longing and hope fulfilled. Templeton went insane for the moment. He started to chant the verse that Gung said was engraved upon the blade.

"That's it!" he gurgled. "That's it!" Then he chanted:

"I, who have parted the planets,  
I, who have laid down the law,  
Bounded the ——"

"Shut up!" growled Chico. "Shut up, you fool!"

The blade glinted in the moonbeams as the Panther moved out into the clearing, and we seemed to be sucked forward by the surge of the mob, who were blind to our presence. They had eyes only for the Great Sword, and we might have crawled under their feet without being noticed at that moment. As the Panther lifted it high above his head, each man in the mob flung his right arm into the air, and made a noise with his mouth similar to the marching tune of the Aisawan dancers, and we found it difficult to keep on our stomachs when that sound came to our ears. We wanted to get up and follow the Panther — follow him round

the clearing with our right arms raised and our eyes on the sword!

There was magic in the night. It sent us reeling down the centuries, stripped of the veneer which civilization had applied to us. The jungle is an uncanny place when it reaches out its feelers, and we recognized that night that man had done a lot to drag himself up from the brute level when he had cleared the land on which he dwelt in an endeavour to fight himself free of the thralldom of jungle growth.

Chico got to his feet with the intention of joining in that barbaric procession, but Templeton seized him by the ankle and jerked him down again. The Britisher had seen the danger of the surroundings, and he had taken a grip of himself. He guessed that the curious marching music, the sight of the Sword, and, above all, the mystery in the night would ruin our chances if we were not careful, and he damned Morgan and me till we worked some of the poison out of our systems beneath his shower of abuse.

"Don't let the thing get a grip on you!" he growled. "There's madness here! You're breathing it with every breath! Sit quiet a moment, and we might get a chance at it when they are putting it back."

The Spotted Panther, in the centre of the struggling mob, was halfway across the clearing, and we wriggled closer to the door of the cave. The bull-roarer was still sounding in the village, and the night seemed full of deviltry. Every time that we, in an effort to keep a clutch upon our sanity, tried to send our thoughts across the ocean to the bright lights and the clean people at home, we were jerked back to the jungle by the clamour and the odours. We couldn't escape the place. We became convinced that the only living persons in the world were those savages on the shores of the Million Mouths of Boorsh, and the three of us that were risking our lives — ay, and our souls — in an endeavour to possess the wonderful sword.

"What will we do now?" cried Chico. "Here's the door of the cave."

"Wait!" gasped Templeton. "Wait and see what the demons will do."

The moon was fighting herself free of the purple mist, and the headhunters screamed louder when they saw that their ceremony was bringing forth results. The clearing became a horrible nightmare, and we were engulfed in the wave of madness.

"There's some one crawling toward us," whispered Chico. "Look out! There to the left!"

Red rose to his knees and gripped his rifle by

the barrel. It was no time for shooting. One shot would bring the charging hundreds down upon us, and we would be reduced to a jelly.

The approaching person stopped, then, as we held our breath and waited for the yell that would bring the mob upon us, a whisper came through the shadows.

“Leesbon!”

“By the Robe of Siva! It’s the Golden One!” muttered Red.

Nao wriggled closer and started to whisper excitedly to Templeton. Chico and I guessed what her message was about. She was protesting against our foolhardiness in venturing so close to the cave, and she was urging Red to retreat as fast as possible. The Panther had turned at the end of the clearing, and there was not much time to waste just then.

“What is it?” asked Chico.

“She wants us to go back,” answered Red.

“Tell her we can’t,” said Morgan. “Thank her, Templeton, thank her for what she has done for us. Tell her I said she’s a splendid woman. Tell her, man!”

Templeton translated Morgan’s message as the procession was coming across the clearing toward us, but in spite of the nearness of the danger we

turned our eyes upon Nao at that moment. She crawled toward Chico, who was close to the door of the cave, took his big hand, kissed it quickly, then turned and slipped away like a shadow.

"She's — she's pure metal," stammered Morgan. Then turning fiercely upon Templeton and me, he said: "Don't forget! If either one of you two get out of this rumpus alive you must take her back with you to civilization. If you don't, I'll haunt you!"

The bull-roarer nearly deafened us at that moment. The noise was infamous. We struggled in a sea of sound that throttled thought. And the procession was sweeping across the shadow-flecked clearing.

It was curious that we could think of no definite plan at that moment. Our brains were incapable of thought. We knew that our position near the mouth of the cave was one of imminent danger, but the longing to see the sword and the desire to take advantage of the opportunity afforded us by the removal of the stone slab made it impossible for us to tear ourselves away from the spot. We crouched in the shadows, yet we knew that the spot where we tried to hide ourselves would soon be covered with the shrieking mob. Our stupidity was amazing at that moment. The desire to possess



the Sword seemed to blind us to the dangers around us.

It was Chico who recovered himself in time to realize our peril. The bull-roarer was silent for a single minute, and in that minute Morgan shook himself free from the spell that we were under.

"We're cut off!" he cried. "What are we up to? We're mad!"

"The sword," muttered Templeton. "Four hundred million people are waiting for it. The sword!"

Chico got to his feet and gripped Templeton by the arm, "There's one hope," he whispered. "The cave! Quick! The cave!"

It seems unbelievable that we should have brought ourselves into a trap like that, but we were crazy with the desire that came of dreams that appeared to be coming true. We had seen the Sword, and we thought that something would happen that would surely give us a chance to obtain possession of it.

Through the dark opening from which the big stone had been dragged by the panting mob went Chico and Templeton, and I stumbled on their heels. Morgan was right. The cave offered the only refuge from the yelling swarm, and as the Panther neared the doorway, we groped our way blindly into the darkness. We didn't think of how we would escape from the place, after the slab



was put back in position. I know I didn't, and I am sure that Chico and Red had no thoughts on the matter just then. We wished to be near the Great Parong and nothing else seemed to matter. We forgot everything but the blade in the grip of the Panther's hands, and as we crouched down in the darkness we were seized with a mad ecstasy at the thought that in a few minutes we would be alone with the thing for which we had risked so much.

The Panther reached the doorway, and the yells came into the cave and woke the echoes of the place. We saw the blade flash in the moonlight as it was lowered at the door, and we knew that its bearer and a score or more of his followers were then in our hiding-place. We didn't breathe. We jammed ourselves against the rocky sides of the place and tried to still the mad pounding of our hearts. We cursed the ticking of Templeton's watch in the silence that followed the entry of the sword bearer. The bull-roarer became silent, the yells subsided, and nothing but the heavy breathing and the soft shuffling of naked feet disturbed the silence.

We felt the heat of their presence as they passed close to us. They were very close. The handle of a spear knocked against my knee, and I shivered.

We were near to the realization of all our hopes, and yet we were chilled by the knowledge that the retreat of the Panther and his bodyguard would be followed by the closing of the entrance. But we would not have made an effort to leave that place if the door was unguarded. We were held there by a lust for possession that was stronger than the desire for life itself.

The Panther and his guard halted within ten feet of us. We heard the chink of metal against stone. What a thrill that sound brought to us! Then the bodies shuffled slowly by, passed through the opening of the cave, and out into the clearing. There was a moment of quiet, then the voice of the leader roared an order, and with shouts and screams the big stone slab was hauled into place.

"Glory be!" breathed Chico. "We're locked in, but we're locked in with the thing we have been dreaming of!"

## CHAPTER XII

### A WHITE CLAW

**N**OW that I review the moments which followed the closing of the cave, I marvel at the accuracy we displayed in locating that spot from which had come the chink of metal upon stone. It was extraordinary. The spot was over ten feet from our hiding-place, and the cave was as black as the heart of a junk pirate, yet we stepped toward it with a certainty that seemed to be born of something stronger than the sense of direction acquired from the sound made when the sword struck the block of stone upon which it rested. Our three outstretched hands touched metal at the same moment, and with a cry of joy we sank upon our knees beside the stone slab. We were touching the Parong of Buddha, the wonder blade of the world!

"It's it!" cried Templeton, and Chico and I repeated the words as our fingers slipped up and down the flat of the great blade. "It's it! It's it!" we echoed.

"We've got it at last!" gasped Templeton.

"At last! At last!" shouted Chico. "Glory be! We've got it at last!"

We were hysterical as we crouched there and fondled that thing. We thought of nothing but it. It was everything to us. It filled our hearts and pushed every other desire and craving into the background. We wept over it, and now and then we cursed it for the madness it brought upon us.

"We'll stir the world," babbled Chico. "We'll set the East ablaze."

"And they're my people!" cried Templeton. "The British, I mean! And this thing — this thing, Morgan, will push them out of India! It will, I tell you! It will!"

"What does it matter to us?" snapped Chico. "We've found it! You and Lenford and I found it, and we don't care what it does to others as long as it brings everything to us."

God alone knows how long we lay in the dark beside that stone, our fingers moving up and down the tremendous blade. Courtney, the opium fiend, obtained no such delight from his pipe as we got from the contact of our fingers with that wonderfully smooth blade. It thrust out of our minds all thoughts of the other things that Gung had spoken of. The Sword, like the Chalice of Everlasting Fire,

seemed to thrill with life, and we could not leave it for an instant.

"Let us take it to the crevice in the wall," said Chico. "The moonlight streams in there, and we can examine it better."

"Yes, yes," cried Red. "Here, let me carry it. I have the handle."

It was then we learned of the tremendous strength of the Spotted Panther. We heard Red struggling with that blade in the darkness, then he cursed softly and spoke to us.

"Didn't the Panther carry it with one hand?" he asked.

"With one hand," I answered. "At least he carried it out of the cave with one hand."

"Well, I can't lift it with one hand," said Red. "You have a try, Morgan. If that brute can juggle with this with one hand he must have the strength of a Samson."

Chico stumbled round the table and made an attempt to lift the blade with one hand, but he was as unsuccessful as Red.

"He must have the arm of Thor," muttered Morgan. "It's quite a weight to handle with two hands."

Chico carried the blade toward the crevice in the wall, through which the moonlight was streaming,

and we followed him. What a sword it was! When Morgan put its point down upon the floor and held it in the white beams that came through the opening, we stood and stared at it till our teeth chattered from nervousness. It was a great blade. It flung up dreams of wonder things, and as the rays washed its naked length in a bath of silver, we felt that it was a blade that Odin might have gripped as he toasted the heroes in Walhalla. We knew that it had done great things. We were sure it had. The air seemed to be charged with stories of its deeds, and we gathered them in through our skins. We were in a state of mind that would have made us feel little astonishment if that wonder sword had started to tell its history to us.

The emerald handle made our throats feel dry as we examined it, and the twisted cobra was a glorious piece of workmanship.

"It was all as we said," muttered Chico. "The golden cobra and the weight and height. See, it is up to my chin."

"And the verse upon the blade," said Templeton. "Here it is in Hindustanee! God be good to us, we're made! We're princes! We're greater than all the rajahs of the thirteen tributary states of India!"

Chico Morgan and I just stood there and looked

and looked. But Red Templeton was inspired at that moment. He surely was. He put his hand on the golden cobra of the hilt and he started to chant of India like the blind fakir at the door of the Dilwara Temple. We never can tell what will come out of the recesses of the brain. Never! Templeton didn't know that he was the possessor of the information he flung at us that night. I'm doubtful if he knows to this day what he said. But I wish I could write it all down here. It might make historians think.

He chanted of Mahmud and Altmish, of Genghis Khan and the Toghlak kings. He told of battle and fire, of pillage and slaughter, of death and deviltry, and that big sword seemed to have a part in everything that he spoke of. He didn't mention the sword, but we knew. There is magic in the air of the East. When he told how the Tartar Timur galloped his big black horse over the praying women in front of Delhi, that sword seemed to thrill in the hands of Templeton. We knew that Timur carried that big sword as he galloped up the slope. We knew in a way that I cannot explain.

He chanted stories of monasteries where treasure of gold and silver and precious stones were guarded by the greasy monks in the yellow robes of Buddhist priests. And we knew that the big parong was



among those treasures. Once at the Golden Wat at Bangkok I had heard a Shan priest speak to a jade Buddha like Templeton spoke to that sword. The Shan was inspired for the moment, and so was Red. We believed everything he said, and we could believe it before all the statements made by spectacled historians who try and piece together the doings of yesterday. It was wonderful!

When he finished we stood around the sword like three obsessed men, fingering it gently, and slowly turning it so that its polished blade could drink up the white light that the scared-looking moon was pouring into the place. And we didn't waste a thought up to that moment as to how we would get out of that place. The intoxication produced by the possession of the weapon made us forget the great slab of stone that barred our way to liberty. There was no room for other thoughts to get into our brain. We could only think of the sword and the mental pictures which Templeton's chant conjured up.

"We'll be princes!" said Chico.

"Ay!" I cried. "I dreamed that we would be princes on the night the White *Mias* stampeded the Dyaks at the Place of Evil Winds."

"And the English will suffer," muttered Templeton. "They'll suffer when the news spreads like a

flame from Howrah to Peshawur. And the English are my people."

"We might make a deal with them," said Chico. "The three of us and Nao — Nao is in the deal, you know. We might sell it to them for millions. What if I struck Broadway with a million, Lenford? If we got a million each, boy!"

"But the English are my people," persisted Templeton. "And this will push them into the Bay of Bengal."

"If they don't make a deal with us," growled Morgan. "We've earned it and we are willing to stop trouble if ——"

Chico stopped and stared at the crevice in the wall of the cave. The moonlight had been suddenly shut off, and for the moment we were unable to discern the reason.

"It's Nao!" cried Morgan. "Speak to her, Red! She has come to see what has happened to us."

It was the Golden One who was peering in through the opening, and she expressed her joy when she discovered that we were alive. I think that the pleasure she derived from hearing Morgan's voice brought her more delight than any news regarding Red or myself, but we were not annoyed at the preference. Chico had saved the girl's life when the Tring had attempted to make her a target for his

blowpipe, so it was natural that she should be interested in his welfare.

"Tell her she's a partner in the sword," shouted Morgan. "Tell her what it's worth, Red! She'll be able to buy half of Portugal when we cash in!"

Templeton spoke to the girl as she cried excited questions into the opening. The sword didn't seem to trouble Nao at that moment.

"She wants to know how we are going to get out of this place," said Red. "She thinks we are imprisoned for all time. The slab can't be moved from the inside."

"The slab?" muttered Chico, as if he was endeavouring to recall something that had slipped from his mind. "Oh, yes! Tell her we'll get out, Red. Tell her not to worry. The Lord never led us to this blade without providing a way to get us out of the place."

"She can't see it with your eyes," said Templeton. "She thinks that the Panther will either discover our presence and starve us to death or that they'll tumble in on us the next time the moon turns red."

"Let them," cried Morgan. "I feel that we're going to get out of this box. I'm sure that we will. I've got a hunch, and I'm not troubling three cents. Tell her what I say, Templeton."

Red started to explain Chico's opinions to the

girl, but while he was still speaking the girl gave a little shriek of horror and dashed across the clearing in the direction of the *kampong*. We could see her distinctly while she was in line with the crevice in the rocky wall of the cave, and we watched her with wide-open eyes as she plunged into the trees and disappeared.

"What is the matter now?" gasped Chico.

"She must have seen some one," whispered Templeton. "She saw somebody over there to the right. I saw the fear sweep over her face when she turned and bolted for the village."

That happening made us think of our position, and a feeling of helplessness stole over us as we peered through the narrow crevice at the moonlit clearing. If the Golden One had put herself in danger by allying herself with us, we were unable to give her the slightest help, and for a few moments we forgot the Great Sword of Buddha as we guessed blindly at the reason for her mad rush across the cleared space.

"It might be the Panther," muttered Templeton. "He was wandering around here the night we struck this place."

Chico cursed softly as he twisted his neck in a vain endeavour to see the shadowy clumps to the right. "Hold the sword for a moment!" he cried.

"I'll try and get a better look by climbing up here." Templeton took the Great Sword, while Morgan endeavoured to get a better look at the clearing by climbing upon a rock and peering through a part of the crevice that was a little wider than the portion that was directly upon the level of our eyes. Not a sound came from the outside. A silence hung over the village, and not a breath of air disturbed the trees.

Chico, hanging to the rocky projections, thrust his face against the crevice while we stood and watched him.

"Can you see anything?" asked Templeton. "Whatever it was it is — Great God!"

Red's shriek followed the devilish snarl that came from the outside. Chico Morgan lost his grip upon the rock and toppled backward, but as he was falling, a white paw slipped through the aperture with the speed of lighting, and Chico's arm was caught in a clutch of steel.

"Quick!" he shouted. "The sword!"

It was Red Templeton whose iron nerves were not upset by the happening and who was able to obey Morgan's order. The big Englishman lifted the Great Parong of Buddha and brought it down on that snaky, muscular claw that held Chico with an ease that terrified us.

The big blade cut through the white paw as if it were a straw and as Morgan stumbled back from the opening, a howl of fury ripped through the night. It was a terrible cry. It went out across the jungle like a lariat of sound, and for a few seconds we stood still and listened. Then Red spoke.

"Did you see?" he asked. "Was it that?"

Chico kicked the hairy claw into the strip of moonlight upon the stone floor. "It was the White *Mias*," he said quietly. "The infernal brute reached for me with the speed of a rattler. Listen! They're moving in the village, and that thing will leave a trail of blood to show them where it was injured!"



## CHAPTER XIII

### NINE HEADS

WHETHER the *kampong* had been aroused by the weird cry, or whether the Golden One or the sentinel had given the alarm, we could not tell, but Chico spoke the truth when he said that the people of the Spotted Panther were moving. We surmised, though, that they were really ignorant of the near presence of the White *Mias*. Nao had informed us that the people of the village held the brute in great fear, and that this fear kept them in their attap houses after a certain hour, so that when we heard them crashing through the trees in the direction of the cave we credited their courage to ignorance.

"If they see the thing they'll break their necks racing for shelter," said Chico. "Golly! she has a grip that made me feel like a toy terrier in the mouth of a mastiff!"

The headhunters broke from cover and came across the clearing yelling like fiends. The Panther was in the lead, and near him was his muscular lieutenant.



Behind them surged the naked warriors, while women and children ran with the men and increased the racket.

"Get back in the shadow," cried Templeton. "They're bound to peep in."

With Red carrying the Great Sword, we moved back from the crevice and stood listening to the yells. The mob came straight for the cave. They surged against it like a black wave, scurried this way and that, then stopped as a terrific shout went up from the Panther.

"*Mias!*" he screamed. "*Aintu mias!*"

A silence gripped the mob as they packed closer round the crevice. The Panther had found the blood of the ghostly orang-utan and his followers crushed together in their fear. At the rear of the crowd some women and children started to sob wildly, but their sobs were suppressed as the leader shrieked an order to the men.

Red Templeton understood the meaning of that order. With a little cry of warning he turned toward the stone slab upon which we had discovered the sword, and Chico and I stumbled after him.

"What's up?" asked Morgan.

"They're coming into this place!" answered Red. "We must put the sword back upon the stone and hide in the back of the cave. Quick!"

"But they might take the sword to the village!" protested Chico.

"No, no!" snapped Templeton. "They're wondering how the blood came to be on the rocks outside, and they're coming in to look."

"But the paw?" whispered Chico.

"Leave it there! Hurry! They're moving the door!"

Templeton put the Great Sword upon the stone from which we had taken it, then we stumbled blindly into the farthest corner of the cave. The cavern ran back a considerable distance, and we were fully thirty yards from the opening when the slab was pushed aside, and the Panther, carrying a torch of resin wood, stalked into the place with the mob at his heels.

The masked leader led the way to the crevice in the rock, and we crouched behind a projecting shelf and watched the torch bobbing up and down. We were certain now that the white paw which Templeton had sliced off the brute that gripped Chico would be discovered, and we wondered stupidly what discoveries would follow the find.

The Panther stopped, lifted his torch high in the air, and then chilled our blood by giving vent to a moan of supreme terror that was taken up by his bodyguard and then by the crowd in the clearing.

It was an infamous cry. It made our teeth chatter with the thoughts of the agony it told of. It conjured up visions of witches, of devils, of things terrible and terrifying that the silent jungles had bred in the minds of the Kyans.

The Panther moaned again and again, and we fidgeted uneasily. I had a mad desire to stand up and scream a protest against the strange whine of fear, and I am sure that Templeton and Morgan had the same inclination. The peculiar outcry was creating an atmosphere like the one manufactured by Gung and the ten Dyaks at the Place of Evil Winds.

The big leader turned suddenly from the contemplation of the severed claw and rushed toward the stone slab upon which rested the Great Parong of Buddha, and we held our breath. The torch was held low over the big sword, then with a wild yell of terror the Panther dashed for the door, and the screaming bodyguard followed him. They had seen the blood upon the big blade, and fear gripped them with a clutch that was more terrible than death itself!

"Be ready!" whispered Templeton. "They might forget the slab."

But that was one thing which the terrified mob was not likely to forget. It was evident to them that

an *aintu*, or hill spirit, had used the sword to cut off the paw of the White *Mias*, and as the evil spirit must be in the cave, it was their duty to keep it there. As we sprang to our feet in readiness to dash out of the opening in case the first shock of terror would carry the crowd back to the *kampung*, the big stone slab was pushed into place, and we were prisoners again.

"What a scare it gave them!" said Chico. "Listen! They're running for the village at full speed."

"It hasn't done us much good," muttered Templeton. "They won't open this place for another ten years. They think that a spirit used the Sword to clip off the paw of the orang-utan, and you can bet your last dollar that they have no desire to get close to the spirit."

Morgan was alongside the stone slab upon which was the Sword, and the fascination exercised by the wonderful blade made Templeton's words have little effect upon him. And I don't think Templeton thought much of how we were going to get out of the place when he came back to the glorious weapon. We could think of nothing but its beauty when we came near, and we fingered it lovingly as we gathered round it.

"We'll get out when the time comes," muttered

Chico. "We'll get out all right. Do you know — don't think I'm mad when I tell you this — but this blade seems to tell me that we'll get out with it."

"I have the same feeling," said Templeton. "It tells me the same."

"And I feel as you two do," I stammered.

"What did that verse say that you could do everything with?" asked Chico.

"With Faith," answered Red. "It is here on the blade. Can't you feel the letters with your fingertips? And it's the truth. It says:

"Ocean and sea and swift river,  
Mountain, volcano and hill  
Slow-circling planets and stardust —  
With *Faith* I can build them at will."

"Well, I'm a perpetual fountain of faith," said Morgan. "I'm going to take this sword to Banjermassin if ten million Dyaks were in the way. Then we'll tote it over to Benares, and we'll charge ten rupees a head for every blamed Buddhist to get a peep at it. How many of them did you reckon there was, Red?"

"There are four hundred million Buddhists in the East," answered Templeton. "That's the lowest estimate of the number in India, China, Tibet, and Japan."

"Then we'll travel with it," said Chico. "We'll have old P. T. Barnum's reputation looking like a wet cruller. Four hundred millions at ten rupees apiece! And only four of us in the partnership!"

Red picked up the Great Parong and moved over to the crevice where the moonlight would allow us to feast our eyes again upon its beauty. The touch of it thrilled us, but the sight of it maddened us. It was a thousand times more impressive than the Chalice of Everlasting Fire. The chalice was beautiful, but the big blade seemed to be the abode of power and force. We knew that the hands of princes and emperors — ay, and of the Great Buddha himself — had gripped the emerald handle, and that the golden cobra had felt the swelling muscles of men who had built their thrones upon the smouldering ruins of empires they destroyed. Glory be! it was wonderful! Things that Chico and I knew nothing of thrust themselves into our minds as we looked at it. It conjured up dreams of battles. We saw charging hosts — Mongols and Tartars, Pathans and Rajputs, bloody Mahommedans and wild-eyed Sikhs. We were crazy men just then. That blade brought up visions of fights that had never been written of, of battles where men who knew not fear went singing to their death behind a leader who swung the sword.



It must have been long after midnight when Red took another look at the clearing. And it was lucky for us that he made that examination. Coming toward the crevice, each armed with a deadly blow-pipe, were the Spotted Panther and his big lieutenant.

"Get under cover!" cried Chico. "They've got over their fright, and they'll send darts into this place till there won't be a square inch without a puncture."

Morgan grabbed the big sword, and, with Red and me behind him, went stumbling back into the dark recesses of the place. A revolver did not appear to us as half so deadly a weapon as the silent blow-pipe. We recalled as we hurried into the darkness, the sudden manner in which the whining man-hound had departed for a better world on the morning before, and we lost no time in moving out of range.

We heard the voice of the two giants at the opening as we groped our way forward. The floor of the cave was uneven, and this nearly proved our undoing. Chico, carrying the sword, stumbled and fell, and while Red and I stooped to give him a helping hand, something that made a sound like the buzzing of a small fly, whipped between our two heads.

"Get down and crawl!" whispered Templeton. "On your knees! On your knees!"



I got lower than my knees. I squirmed along on my stomach, filled with terror lest one of the unseen darts would find me. It was not exactly death that we feared at that moment. We had faced death before, but we had never faced it with such a wonderful treasure in our possession. We were horrified at the thought of death now that the Great Sword was in our hands.

"Keep moving," whispered Chico. "We'll be out of range directly."

We struck the rear wall of the cave and crawled along it, feeling blindly for a niche of some kind into which we could thrust ourselves for protection. Our sixth sense told us that we were still in range of the deadly blowpipes, and the wet wall seemed mighty unsympathetic as we clawed at it in an effort to find shelter.

Chico Morgan stopped after we had been fingering that rock for about ten minutes, and he poked around in the darkness.

"What's up?" asked Red.

"I'm looking for something," whispered Chico. "Say, how many heads did I poke into that hole in the floor of the little cave on the cliff."

"Nine," I answered.

"Are you sure?" asked Morgan.

"Certain."

"Well, they're here," breathed Morgan. "I found them by their odour. Nine heads, all in a row. It looks as if the water had worn a passage through the soft limestone from the little cave down into this place."

Templeton and I felt our way to Chico's side and fingered the heads. We counted them half a dozen times. There were nine, sure enough, and although we carefully searched the immediate vicinity we could find no others.

"But there's nothing to it," whispered Red. "It's just a coincidence."

"Not so," protested Chico. "I know the infernal smell of these skulls. I'll wager that they're the same batch."

"And if they are, what good will it do us?" asked Templeton. "The hole isn't large enough for a boy to crawl through."

"But the sandstone is rotten," breathed Chico. "Spirits o' nitre! there's a hope! The little cave in the cliff must be directly above this spot, and if these heads rolled down through the passage there's a possibility of our climbing back through it."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PASSAGE IN THE CLIFF

**M**ORGAN'S argument brought hope. The fact that the number of heads upon the floor in the cave corresponded with the number Chico had thrust down the hole appeared to be something more than a mere coincidence, and we groped madly around in search of an opening in the wall.

"They didn't come through the roof, if they came at all," muttered Chico. "If they had fallen through the roof they would have bounced in all directions. The passage is in the side wall."

Our fingers were bleeding as we rubbed them over the wet wall. At the other end of the cave we could see the thin strip of moonlight where the Panther and his lieutenant were busy with their blowpipes, and we knew that they had knowledge of our position. Their deep whispers came to us, and we sensed the flying death upon the atmosphere.

It was Red Templeton who discovered the passage down which the nine heads had rolled from the

little cave up on the cliffside. The opening was about five feet from the floor, and it was so narrow that a grown man could not get his shoulders inside. But the sandstone was so soft that it broke away in large pieces when we touched it with our hands.

"We must make it larger," breathed Templeton. "If we could get back to the small cave we could escape across the morass to-morrow night. Wouldn't it be great!"

"It would," Chico muttered, as he clawed at the wall with one hand while he grabbed the big blade with the other. "It would be splendid! If we could get this sword to Benares, boys! Tear into it! We've got to get out!"

A thrill swept over us then, and we forgot the pair at the crevice. We tried to remember them, but we couldn't. We tried to keep our voices down, but the wine of victory intoxicated us, and we shouted encouragement to each other. That sword must have made a thousand victors. The man who had it in his possession could not possibly be a craven. It brought confidence, power, victory. We could understand how the Tartar Timur had galloped his big black horse to the gates of Delhi when he had that blade in his hands. It filled him with such courage that he would have galloped

to the gates of Hades and challenged the Evil Spirits to mortal combat.

We worked like madmen in tearing away the soft sandstone. It came away in masses, and Templeton crawled up into the opening and thrust the rock back with hands and feet.

"Go after him, Lenford!" ordered Chico. "I've got the sword, so I'll go last."

I crawled into the burrow behind Red, and although I was nearly smothered by the avalanche of sand he flung back upon me, I held to my task of thrusting it back into the cavern to make room for what he dislodged. We couldn't speak. The dust choked us, but as we scratched and scraped in that passage our thoughts went out across the China Sea and the Indian Ocean to the Temple at Benares, where our minds pictured the hundreds of thousands who would gather to see the wonder blade we had brought from its hiding-place.

Red Templeton stopped scratching and called a question to me.

"Is Morgan in the burrow?" he asked.

"I don't know," I answered. "I'll speak to him."

I turned my head and called out to Chico, but I got no answer, so I slipped back over the dirt into the cave.

"Morgan," I whispered. "Where are you?"

A gurgle came from the darkness, and I dropped upon my knees and felt around. That gurgle terrified me. I knew that Chico had been wounded, but, curiously, the fear that came to me was not from the knowledge of Morgan's danger. I was afraid that the sword might have been taken from him after he had been struck down. Chico was my friend, but the Great Sword of Buddha was more to me at that moment than any friend.

I found Morgan upon the floor, breathing heavily, and when I clutched his arms to find out if he still possessed the sword, I discovered that the right hand was wet and sticky. The left gripped the big emerald handle, and as I shook him gently, my brain told me what had happened. I caught the wet hand and checked the guess which my mind had made. A dart from the deadly blowpipes had pierced the first finger of Chico's right hand, and knowing that death would follow if he did not act quickly he had sliced off the finger with the big parong. I knew that he had either fainted from the loss of blood, or else was in a comatose condition produced by the small amount of poison which had entered his system before he amputated his finger.



Before I had time to bind up the wound, Red Templeton was beside me.

"What is wrong?" he whispered.

I explained the situation, and Red endeavoured to rouse Chico while I bound the thumb with rough bandages I made from the sleeves of my shirt.

"Wake up, Morgan," whispered Templeton. "Wake up, man! You're not hurt."

Chico groaned gently, rolled over on his side and tried to move his legs. "They feel dead," he gasped. "Could — could one of you fellows rub them a moment? The poison from that dart made me feel as dead as a lump of wood."

"It'll wear off after a few minutes," said Templeton. "You were lucky you got the thing in your finger."

Red and I rubbed vigorously at Chico's arms and legs, and after about five minutes' hard work on our part, the circulation improved. The numbness left his limbs, and with Templeton and me supporting him, we managed to get him into the passage.

"Give me the Sword," said Red. "I'll go first, and Lenford can push you from the rear."

"No, I'll carry the blade," muttered Chico. "I'm all right now. The stuff they dip those darts into must be strong! It had hardly whipped into my finger before all the blood in my body turned to lead."



We felt safe from those infernal poisoned darts when we crept into the passage, even if there was a bit of scratching to be done before we could reach the cave on the cliff.

"I believe we'll get there," whispered Templeton. "I feel a freshness in the air."

We worked like madmen! We tore at that soft stone till our finger nails were broken and bleeding. Lying on our stomachs, we wormed our way upward, and our thoughts of the Great Sword gave us a strength that made us think we were able to tear down a mountain. We didn't stop to picture the difficulties that lay in front of us when we reached the cave, we only thought of the task of getting there, and Templeton nearly smothered Chico by the amount of sand that he thrust back upon him.

"We're nearly there!" he cried. "I can sniff the air of the dawn. Keep at it. For the love of heaven! keep at it!"

Red was right about the chill of the dawn in the air that came to us from the direction in which we were climbing. The nine heads had surely come down by the water-worn passage, which was unknown to the Spotted Panther and his followers!

"Four hundred million at ten rupees a head!" gasped Chico. "Don't smother me, Templeton!"

You'll get enough out of the business without trying to kill me!"

Red was nearly crazy just then, and Chico and I were as bad. We sniffed the cold air and we longed to see the dawnlight beating on the emerald handle, on the hilt made of the twisted cobra, and on the glory of the golden blade that had torn kings and emperors from their thrones.

Templeton gave a gurgle of joy, and we knew what had happened. He had thrust his head up through the opening into which Chico had stuffed the heads the night before, and, smothered with earth, we fought our way up and stretched ourselves full length beside him. Chico laid the great blade lengthwise in front of us, and in the faint dim light of the dawn we did obeisance to it. We were infidels then. We knew no God only the god of strength and power that we sensed in the Great Parong of Buddha.

Chico crawled to the round opening from which we had watched the human bloodhound twenty-four hours previously — it seemed twenty-four years to us just then — and he looked out toward the village and the Mouths of Boorsh.

"Do you think we could do it?" questioned Red. "Could we creep down to the marsh and get away before sunrise?"

"I don't think so," answered Morgan. "It would be a narrow squeeze. Besides — besides ——"

"Besides what?" asked Templeton.

"There's Nao," said Chico quietly. "We're not going out of this spot without her. At least I'm not going."

Templeton looked at the Great Sword for a moment without speaking. When one forgot his God in looking at that blade, Red's momentary forgetfulness of the Golden One was not to be wondered at.

"We could wait for her on the other side of the morass," he muttered.

"There'll be no waiting game for us when we leave here," snapped Chico. "Besides, we'd never get across the Mouths of Boorsh if she wasn't there to guide us."

That sounded like gospel truth to Templeton and me. Morgan's remark brought up a vision of the squealing boar and the circular mouths fringed with the green slimy moss — the mouths that quivered as we walked near them, as if they were hungry for something to devour.

"Well, we'll have to put in another day here," said Templeton quietly. "I hope the fiends don't locate us, although I've got a feeling in my bones that they will."

I had the same feeling as I lay on the floor of the little cave and fingered the blade, waiting anxiously for the sun to rise so that the full beauty of the thing might be shown to us. We had only seen it in the moonlight, but it was never made to be examined by the moonlight. It was to be seen only when the blazing sun flashed upon its glorious length of blade, and the great cobra and the magnificent emerald fed upon the sunbeams.

"Yes, we'll have to wait," said Chico. "They're stirring already in the village, and we're not in the humour for a ten-mile run with a few hundred niggers after us."

Templeton brought the Great Parong close to the opening, and as the pink blush crept into the eastern sky, we knelt beside it and marvelled as the beauty of the workmanship was made plainer as the light increased. There was never a blade in all the world like that blade. There couldn't be. As we sat and stared at it we knew it to be the subject of half the battle songs of the East. We knew! The great emerald of the handle that fitted into the mouth of the golden cobra we recognized as the emerald which the holy Hussan saw drop from the seventh heaven when the soul of the Yogi entered, while the cobra brought back to our minds the stories which the Shans tell of the hamadryad

of Gautama that saps the courage of all who look upon it. We could understand how the courage of a man would be sucked up when he saw the Sword swinging before his eyes.

But it was the blade itself — the beautiful, sinuous blade — that gripped us. Down its shining length were the words of the poem that Gung had recited to us, and although the words were in a tongue that we were ignorant of, we felt that we could have read them if Gung had never told us of their meaning. That was curious. Chico followed the inlaid words with his fingers, chanting the verse softly as he moved his hand down the blade, and we had the same opinion as Morgan as to where each line ended. Red and I joined in with him as he reached the last two lines, and just as the rim of the golden sun peeped above the green swath of jungle, we spoke them together:

“Slow-circling planets and star-dust,  
With *Faith* I can build them at will.”

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CHALLENGE

**T**HERE was something strange about the morning which broke upon us as we lay in that little cave on the cliffside. Perhaps it was the possession of the Great Parong that made us feel that it was a morning totally different from any that we had lived. Perhaps our covetousness had changed us so that we saw signs that we had never looked for before. But whatever it was that brought the feeling, we could not rid ourselves of it, and with faces filthy with blood and perspiration we lay at the mouth of the cave and watched and waited. We had not eaten anything since noon of the previous day, and our throats were parched with thirst.

"I feel as if something is going to happen," said Chico. "I've got an itch in the soles of my feet, and I get that always on red-letter days. Don't you remember that I had the feeling on the morning the crew of the *Happy Prince* mutinied, Lenford?"



"Yes, you did," I answered.

"Sure, I did," said Chico. "I get hunches about big happenings, and I've got one right now."

"I think we should have chanced the morass," remarked Templeton. "If they find the sword has been taken from the cave they'll rake every inch of this country in search of it."

"Let them," snarled Chico. "We've got the treasure, and we've got a few cartridges that will make it awkward for any one who attempts to get it back in a hurry. And we've got something else, Red. Do you know what it is?"

"Faith," answered Templeton.

"Ay, Faith!" cried Chico. "What does that verse say it has done? That's it! 'Hurled up the mountains that whisper a litany sweet to the sun!' Why I feel as if I could raid the *kampong* with this blade. We won't put it in a temple, Red. We won't! We'll go and conquer a kingdom with it. Gee! it was made for conquerors, not for greasy pilgrims to maul with their sweaty fingers."

We thought the same as Chico. That blade looked as if it had been built for hands that were as sinewy and powerful as those of Tamerlane and Akbar. Every time we looked at it we seemed to see bearded chieftains swinging it at the head of squadrons that made the earth tremble.



A silence fell on us as we sat and waited, a silence that seemed to be brought about by the stillness of the village. It seemed as if the people of the Spotted Panther had overslept themselves after the excitement of the night, and we waited anxiously for some action that would tell us what they intended to do. It was hardly possible that they would let the happenings at the cave pass without investigation, and we stroked the Great Sword and waited for the moment to arrive. Chico was right about the strength that one derived from the beautiful blade. When one touched it with the fingers a flood of courage seemed to flow from it, and the muscles of the arms grew tense as if they responded to a call which the Sword had given. It wanted a conqueror to swing it, a conqueror whose muscular hand would press against the gold cobra whose hooded head bit at the emerald.

"The blood of the White *Mias* is the only stain on it," said Templeton.

"And the blood of my finger," added Chico. "It saved my life for a start. I wouldn't have had the strength to get my knife out of its sheath."

I made a movement to wipe the bloodstains from the shining blade, but Templeton stopped me. "Leave them on it," he said. "It has been so long without blood that it must be thirsty for it.

I'm thirsty, too. I'd give anything for a quart of water."

"Nao might locate us after a while," murmured Chico hopefully. "She'll be looking for —— Here they come!"

Morgan didn't see the crowd when he spoke. He only heard the peculiar cry which the mob had given vent to when they followed the Panther in their efforts to allay the anger of the *aintus* which they saw expressed in the Moon of Blood. But that strange chant was enough to put us on the alert. It was a chant of fear, of terror, of concentrated awe, and we understood they had but waited for the sunrise to make an investigation of the cave.

The Panther and his big lieutenant led the crouching, whining headhunters. They came on to the clearing with heads lowered, bodies inclined forward, and the left hand of each placed above the eyes as if to shield them from any fearful sight which might appear suddenly before them. Across the green space they streamed, a horde of greasy fiends, the Panther leading them straight for the stone slab which they had hurriedly put into place when they fled the cave.

"We're in for it now," growled Chico. "The big fellow has convinced them that there's something more than spirits in the cave."

"It seems like it," assented Red. "They'll find the sword has disappeared, and then particular Sheol will break out around this neighbourhood."

The impending trouble weighed upon us like a heavy hand. We had recovered the sword, but it looked as if all our work would be in vain. The procession that filed toward the mouth of the cave made us realize our weakness, and Banjermassin seemed to be a million miles away.

"They'll find the passage," murmured Chico.

"Sure they'll find it," said Red.

"And they'll find us."

"We can't help it," said Templeton.

"And they'll take the sword," muttered Morgan.

"After we've lessened the population of their village," cried Red. "Let them come!"

The big slab was moved aside by two hundred sinewy hands, and into the cave dashed the head-hunters. The chant of fear became louder as they came closer to the supposed haunt of the evil spirits, and we waited breathlessly for the shout that would tell of the disappearance of the sword. And that shout came. It rushed out of the cave like a projectile of sound, and the jungle echoed with its volume. It was a terrific yell. In the *kampong* the women and men took up the cry as if they knew

instinctively the news that it carried, then it died away and a silence fell upon the mob.

"Now they are on the trail," muttered Chico. "Look out that none of them sneaks up the passage before we expect them. They move mighty fast."

Morgan was right in saying that they were on the trail. The silence that followed the cry of anger told us that the fear had fled from the investigators and we guessed that the Spotted Panther had convinced them in some way that the theft of the Great Parong was the work of human enemies.

"Perhaps they found your finger, Chico," whispered Red. "Well, we're in for a battle, and may the Almighty be kind to us. The odds are big enough to earn us some pity."

The women and old men were now pouring on to the clearing, and in the packed mob we caught a glimpse of the Golden One, her hands pressed tightly to her head as if horrified by the discovery. Occasionally her eyes swept the cliff as if she suspected our presence, but we kept back from the entrance and patiently awaited developments. Fate had been good to us from the moment we left the Barito River, and the extraordinary manner in which matters had shaped themselves for our benefit had given us a confidence that was out of keeping with the situation. We thought that Destiny had booked

us to bring the Great Parong back to the waiting millions of the Orient, and this notion became so deep-rooted that we felt that we had a grievance against Fortune for throwing so many obstacles in our path.

"Let them come," muttered Morgan. "Let them all come. Old men and old women. We've got it, and victory is on the side of the persons who have that in their possession."

I suppose it was the peculiar feeling of power, brought to one by the ownership of the weapon, that was responsible for the wild tales that were associated with it. We thought of fivescore stories which Gung had told us as we sat and watched the surging crowd on the clearing, and I know that we were all possessed of an insane feeling that we could stampede the horde if we rushed down the cliff swinging the big blade above our heads. Gung had said that the Rajputs called the great weapon, "The Maker of War," and as we sat there we felt that the Rajputs were right. It was a maker of war. One could not resist the inclination to cut and thrust when one gripped the great handle.

Red Templeton, squatting above the hole in the corner, lifted his hand, and we listened. The Panther's men had struck the trail. From the

burrow that we had enlarged came smothered grunts and hoarse cries that told a tale.

"They're coming," breathed Templeton. "Glory be! they're coming!"

His hand reached out for the big parong, but Chico's went in the same direction.

"Let me!" cried Red.

"But I want to," said Morgan. "My hands are itching to make a stroke with it."

"Go ahead, then!" muttered Templeton. "Not a downstroke, man! You might strike the rock with it. Swing it sideways, and I hope it's the Panther's head you swing it against."

Chico took the sword and crouched upon his knees. His shirt had been torn from his body in the passage, and he looked as primitive as the Spotted Panther as he waited for the first head to appear above the floor. We were not civilized men in that place. The poison of the jungle had got into us and the veneer of civilization had been peeled off.

The head of the leading pursuer came up with the sudden jerk of a jack-in-the-box, and Chico struck. The blade took the headhunter in his thick neck, and Morgan gave a chuckle of delight.

But the sudden halt of the leader did not daunt those in the rear. The headless body was pushed



up and up by the savages who were following. Again the big blade swept through the air, but before it struck, the doomed man yelled a warning and the movement from below stopped. The second body was drawn back into the passage, and Chico rose from his knees.

"They'll come from the front now," he said. "They've hauled number two back to see what struck him."

The three of us moved to the round opening in the front of the cave, keeping an occasional eye upon the hole in the corner. But Chico was right in stating that the passage through the floor had lost all attraction for the naked warriors. A tremendous howl of rage and wonder came from the cavern in which the Great Parong had been kept, and the packed masses in the clearing were thrown back as the Panther and his followers rushed into the open.

"May Allah be good to us!" muttered Templeton. "Here is the beginning of the end."

"If either of us survive the fight remember Nao," said Chico. "If any one escapes let him take her and give her a share in the sword — that is, if he can get away with the sword."

A thousand pairs of eyes were upon the mouth of our cave at that moment, and after the Panther



had spoken a few words that we could not understand, a silence spread out over the mob like a wave. It welled out to the rim of the crowd and choked the jabbering upon the fringe.

"What's up?" asked Chico.

"They want to see us," answered Red. "They're doubtful if we're spirits or men."

It was the madness that gripped Morgan that made him act as he did at that moment. He clutched the sword, sprang through the opening, and standing upon the little ledge in front of the cave held the big bloodstained blade high in the air. Body o' me! what a sight he was! He was bare to the waist and his big muscles stood out like ropes beneath his fair skin. And in the blazing sunlight of the tropic morning that weapon looked like a tongue of flame that licked up the sunbeams that rushed toward it. You would picture such a man and such a blade beneath the walls of Troy, and as I looked at him I wondered if I was dreaming, and if the trip with its unbelievable happenings was not the creation of a brain crazed by jungle fever. But it was all true. Everything around us was real. The sour odour of the Mouths of Boorsh came to our nostrils, the old, old smell of the jungle penetrated our subconscious minds and made us one with our ancestors who fought the mammoth

when the crystalline rocks of Cape Comorin were new.

"Look out for the blowpipes!" cried Templeton.

"Let them come!" roared Chico. "I'm not afraid of them!"

Red and I knew that he was not boasting. There wasn't a boast in Chico Morgan. The sword had intoxicated him, and he would have faced a thousand with it in his hands.

A warrior standing near the Panther lifted his deadly blowpipe to send a dart, but the masked chief dashed down the blowpipe as a cry went up from the crowd.

"*Aintu! Aintu!*" they yelled, and the word was followed by cries of fear as Chico moved the blade slowly from side to side.

"What has bitten them, Red?" asked Morgan. "What are they saying?"

Templeton strained his ears to catch the words that were repeated over and over again; then in a lull of the shouting, the words came to us in a different tongue but in a voice we knew. It was the voice of the Golden One, and it was evident that she had shouted the message for our benefit.

"They think we're spirits!" cried Templeton, translating the warning shout. "There is blood upon the Great Sword, and only a spirit could put it there!"

Chico lowered the blade, placed the point of it upon the rock and rested his chin upon the emerald handle.

"We've got to keep the stunt up," he said. "And you've got to fan a belief mighty hard to keep it going. Come out and stand alongside me."

Red and I climbed out of the cave and stood beside Chico, and in a silence that seemed to put every nerve in our bodies upon a tension, we looked down at the mob in the clearing. We could not guess their thoughts at that moment. Their mouths, smeared with the juice of the betel nut, were wide open, their eyes showing the terror which gripped them as they stared at Morgan standing upon the rocky ledge in front of our little cave.

"What's the next move?" asked Chico.

Templeton fingered his rifle and looked at the masked face of the Panther. The big brute and his lieutenant had worked their way to the front of the mob, and now stood regarding us from a spot that was less than twenty yards from the point where we were standing.

"I hardly know what to do," answered Red. "Personally I'd like to engage the best guide in the camp and lead the retreat across the morass."

"We'll have to wait for the darkness to get away," said Chico. "They'd never let us get clear with

it in the daylight. You must think of something that will keep our heads on our shoulders till the night falls. Something that will astonish them."

"I could drill a hole in the Panther," whispered Templeton. "And I'm wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea. The brute doesn't look as much impressed as the rest of them!"

There was a ripple in the middle of the crowd at that moment, the men and women were brushed aside, and out from the oily mob came a hag who seemed as old as the jungle itself. She looked as if she had started with the world and grown up with it. When we looked at the lines in her face and the little black eyes that glanced up at us, our thoughts were of glacial epochs, fossils, stone hatchets, mastodons, and other things that were around when the world was young. She was the original Old Woman of the Mountain who had hooked herself on to the centuries and refused to be shaken off. By the bones of Methuselah! she was old.

The hag started in to talk to us, speaking in a thin, whining voice that went through the air like a wire. There wasn't a sound from the crowd. They stood with open mouths and listened, and Chico and I glanced at Red and wondered stupidly if his knowledge of the Dyak tongue al-

lowed him to get a grasp upon the sermon she was delivering.

"Do you understand any of it?" asked Chico.

"A word here and there," answered Templeton. "We have been expected for years and years, so she says. There's some prophecy at the back of it. I don't know what it all means. If we're spirits, as they think we are, the Mouths of Boorsh are going to close up, according to her tale."

"I hope they do," said Chico fervently. "We'll get a better run for home if that blamed place is filled in."

The hag continued without a pause, and the hot sun beat down upon our bare shoulders till we inwardly damned her eloquence. She was the greatest female orator we had ever heard of. That speech must have been packed away in her head for a century, and she had been praying daily for an opportunity to unloose it.

She finished at last, and Red Templeton breathed a sigh of relief. "We're safe," he said. "The hag is certain that we are the three mentioned in the prophecy. You, Morgan, are the particular bright star that will wave your hand over the Mouths of Boorsh and make the place as flat and as solid as a billiard table."

The old woman was swallowed up in the crowd,

and we waited for the next turn on the programme. If the belief expressed by her was general, we were in luck. If we could communicate with Nao during the day we could arrange to steal away when night fell upon the village, and we would be miles on our way to the Barito before dawn.

"But what are we to do now?" asked Chico. "Do they feed spirits? I'd give a lot for a plate of rice and a gallon of water."

"They might tell us what the next item is," said Templeton. "Look, the Panther is going to speak to us."

The big masked brute walked to the spot where the hag had stood, gripped the handle of his kris with his right hand, and started to speak slowly. That giant had the deepest voice we had ever heard. It boomed through the hot air like the heavy bass of a monster organ. For over three minutes the deep voice belaboured our ears like a flail of sound, and we were rather pleased when he stopped speaking.

"What did he say?" asked Chico.

"I couldn't understand him," replied Templeton. "I'm going to speak to him in Portuguese. He'll get Nao to translate, and we'll have a chance to say a word to her."

Red had a mighty strong voice, too. When he



spoke you could hear him half a mile away, and his words caused a bit of a sensation. The Panther roared out an order, and next moment the Golden One was thrust through the crowd till she reached the side of the masked leader. She looked sweeter than ever at that moment. Her eyes were lit up with excitement, and the masses of black hair were crowned with a wreath of tiny white flowers that gave her the air of a princess. She made no sign that she recognized us, and we preserved the same attitude.

The Panther repeated his remarks and she translated them into Portuguese, speaking clearly and without nervousness.

"The big brute doubts us," whispered Red. "He doesn't believe in the old woman's story."

"Well, what will he do?" asked Chico. "I'd fight him if I could get a meal for licking him."

The Panther was speaking again, and Templeton listened as Nao translated.

"You 're going to get your wish quick and sudden," said Red as the girl finished speaking. "The big savage issues a challenge to a fight without weapons. He says if we really are spirits that the one of our number that fights him will surely kill him. If we are not spirits he will surely kill his opponent."



"I'll fight him," said Chico quietly. "Tell the girl to tell him so."

"But you don't own the sword," protested Red.

"I hold it," snapped Morgan. "Let me fight him! I'm sure that I can win!"

Templeton pushed me to the rear and stood beside Chico. "By the Spear of Siva! he shall have his pick!" he said. "It would be the safest plan to send a bullet through the brute, but as he's sport enough to put weapons aside, we're not going to back down!"

Templeton spoke quickly to Nao, and with a look of terror in her big eyes the girl translated to the Panther.

The savage seemed to grow bigger as he received that message. He straightened himself till he stood head and shoulders above the biggest of his followers. And he looked the very incarnation of strength. Fear of him came upon me as his eyes measured the two white men standing up unflinchingly on the rocky ledge, and I protested loudly against the proposition. I was a craven at that moment.

"Don't fight him!" I cried. "I'll send a bullet into him! Don't! Don't!"

I lifted the revolver, but Templeton wrenched it from my hand. "He has barred out weapons,"

he said quietly. "Let him have a chance. Keep quiet, Lenford. We'll beat him."

I believe the Panther smiled beneath the bark-cloth mask that covered his face and neck as he noted my action. For a full minute he examined the two men, his eyes noting both closely, then he told his decision to the Golden One. Templeton and I knew which one he had picked. The girl's face was as white as snow and she wet her lips in an effort to repeat his words. Three times she essayed to speak, and three times words failed her, then the Panther decided to take the matter of acquainting us in his own hands. Striding halfway up the slope he seized a pebble, which he tossed with such accuracy that it struck Chico in the chest, and he nodded his head to show that Morgan was the one he chose to measure his strength against.

Chico flushed as the pebble struck him, and his eyes blazed. "I'll kill him for that," he said quietly. "Take the sword, Templeton. I'm glad — mighty glad that he has chosen me."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GREAT FIGHT

**N**OW as I start to describe the fight of fights when Chico Morgan battled with the Spotted Panther on that memorable morning, I feel again the thousand and one thrills which came to me after the pebble had been thrown. Chico was my friend. He had been my shipmate for seven years. Together we had ploughed the seven seas and sat in the camps of the rim. Furthermore, and that knowledge stirred me more than anything as I followed him down the little path to the packed clearing, he was an American. I should have been jealous if Red Templeton had been selected. It may seem petty of me to make such an assertion, but although I had a fear that the Spotted Panther would prove too much for Morgan, still I was glad that the prestige of the white race was to be upheld by one who came from my own land.

“We must get some food,” said Red. “You cannot fight in the condition you are in. Let me

make a postponement, Morgan. You've had no rest and no food."

Chico shook his head. "I'll never be in better mood to fight than I am now," he said. "I couldn't eat any food just now. I want to moisten my lips, that's all."

The Panther had shouted to the crowd as we walked down the stony slope, and as we stepped on to the clearing the mob opened to receive us. We had no thought of treachery. From the looks of wide-eyed fear which the crowd bestowed upon us, we knew that the words of the hag had made a great impression, and although they were willing to watch the impending battle, their anxiety was for the Panther, who they were convinced was going to fight a spirit that had entered the cave of the sword while the big stone slab was still in place. A score or more were so impressed with the danger their chief was running that they made shrill protestations, which the Panther stopped with a deep-throated order.

As we came close to the big savage my fears for Chico became greater. The Dyak was a mighty man. Never had I seen a man of such muscular build. He was a brown Hercules, a Hercules with all the spring and elasticity of the wild man in his limbs. Chico seemed slow and muscle-bound com-

pared with him. The savage had never worn shoes, and as I watched his feet as he moved across the grass I thought sadly over the effect which a prolonged fight upon the springy turf would have upon Morgan.

"He's a devil!" I muttered to Templeton.

Red looked carefully from Chico to the brown man and then tucked his lips in as if the conclusions troubled him. "He's a fine brute," he said quietly. "The most magnificent specimen of a man I have ever seen."

I fingered the revolver which I had received back from Templeton, and I think the desire to shoot the big brown man shone in my eyes at that moment. I felt that I would be committing a murder to stop the Panther committing one, but the big Englishman guessed my intentions.

"If you use a gun I will kill you with my own hands, Lenford," he said slowly. "Morgan will beat him, I tell you. He has tradition and pride of race behind him, and besides — besides, you simpleton, he is fighting for the Sword."

The big lieutenant of the Panther had beaten back the crowd till there was a clear circle in the middle of the clearing. The lieutenant seemed to be the only one who exhibited the confidence of his chief, and his broad grin annoyed Templeton while Chico was

preparing for the fray. The Panther had no preparations to make. He was naked except for the loin cloth and the mask that covered his face.

Morgan took off his shoes and rolled up the legs of the soiled khaki trousers. His shirt had been torn to shreds in the passage between the big cavern and the little scooped-out burrow on the cliff. I redressed the stump of the finger, Templeton protesting angrily that the injury would handicap Morgan, and asserting that the Panther's choice might have been influenced by the bloody bandage.

"Let me fight him!" cried Red. "Let me explain that your hand is injured."

Chico smiled the old confident smile as he brushed the fair hair back from his forehead. "Don't worry, Templeton," he said. "I'll be going strong at the finish. If he's ready to start the skirmish, I'm his man."

We shall be a poor race when we cannot fight. Courage is one of the greatest virtues, and no man born had greater courage than Chico Morgan. I thrilled from head to toe as he stepped forward, and I know that Red Templeton felt a joy in the knowledge that he had picked no craven as a mate on that night in Banjermassin. We knew that the battle was to be one to the death. If Chico could not finish the Panther, the old woman's assertion that



we were the spirits spoken of in the prophecy would be thrown aside, and the heads of Morgan, Templeton, and myself would probably adorn the walls of the chief's house in the *kampong*.

"For the white race and America," muttered Red. "Keep cool, boy. You'll beat him every inch of the way."

That Dyak was well named when they called him the Spotted Panther. As Chico Morgan advanced to the centre of the cleared space, the savage gave a low whine, and sprang. It was a wonderful spring! He shot through the air like a thunderbolt, but Chico wasn't the one to wait for a human cannon ball to knock the wind out of him. He sidestepped neatly, and as the brown man whizzed by, Morgan planted a right on the side of his head that must have jarred every nerve in his gigantic frame. It was a beautiful punch. The Panther went forward on his hands and knees, but he bounded to his feet as if made of india rubber and he flung himself with marvellous suddenness upon the white man. Chico couldn't evade that leap. He thought to stop the rush by landing right and left body blows as the Panther rushed, but the blows seemed to have no effect upon the savage. He broke through Morgan's guard, and his huge arms went around Chico's chest like the feelers of an octopus.



I am sure that those savages had never seen a fight like that. In all that wild stretch of jungle there was no man as strong as the Spotted Panther, and I am willing to wager that no man, white, brown, or black, possessed the courage that was Morgan's. Fear was an unknown quantity to that big American. He had implicit confidence in himself, a confidence that had been bred by the muscles of steel that had brought him victorious out of a thousand tight corners in different parts of the world.

The great Dyak shifted his grip, and his big hands groped for Chico's throat. And there was death in those hands. The fingers of steel fascinated Templeton and me as we stood and watched with bulging eyes. Again and again Morgan broke the grip that the other put upon him, but the savage was unrelenting. His fingers were hungry for the throat of the white man. They worked toward it stealthily and quietly, and the smashing blows which Chico rained upon him could not turn him from the desire to accomplish the trick which was uppermost in his mind.

"Tear off his mask!" cried Templeton. "Tear it off and you'll see where his jaw is!"

Chico broke from the gorillalike hug of the Panther, sidestepped a mad rush, and clawed the bark-cloth mask from the face of the Dyak as he slipped

out of his path. Templeton gave a cry of horror which I echoed. We had no idea as to what Chico would expose when he tore away the mask. We thought that the big fiend had worn the covering to add a touch of mystery to his person, but when Morgan acted upon Templeton's advice we knew differently. By the Beard of Mahomet! Yes! The face that the Panther turned upon Chico was the face of a silver leper, and if ever the face of a devil was seen upon earth it was the one we saw then!

We knew that his people had never seen the marks of the disease. The whimper of astonishment that came from the lips of the packed hundreds told us that they were as much astonished as we were. We were certain that they had never looked upon that face of horror. They moaned and whimpered in fear and wonder, the women turning away from the fiendish, disease-marked face that was confronting Morgan.

Curiously, the terrible markings had not extended to the neck and body. Not a single spot showed upon the muscular column that supported the head, and we stared at the freak in amazement. It was the strangest manifestation of the disease that we had ever seen.

Chico reeled back when he caught the first glance of the terrible face he had uncovered. For a

moment I had a feeling that the horror before him would make him turn and run, but I was measuring Morgan's courage with my own bushel. Satan himself couldn't make Chico run. That fear-inspiring face gave him a momentary qualm, but when the Panther rushed upon him with a howl of fury Morgan was there to receive him.

"Hit him again, Morgan!" cried Templeton. "Again! Again!"

With magnificent skill Chico planted his two fists on the silvered face, and the force with which those two blows went home told us the brand of courage that Morgan was carrying. We knew there was no yellow streak in his make-up. When his fists landed solidly upon the Panther's face I felt sick at the mere thought of physical contact with the disease-ravaged features, but if we could judge by the force which Morgan put behind those punches we were certain that he was not afraid to hit. And Chico had only a few seconds to steel his nerves to the sight of that face. The suddenness with which the spectacle had been brought before him was enough to upset the balance of any ordinary man, but Morgan was not an ordinary man. He was a fighting machine of wonderful thews and courage, and the big Dyak found that out before that fight was over.

The Panther, although insane with passion at finding that his mask had been torn away, realized what a shock the sight of his face would be to Morgan and he rushed in to take advantage of Chico's astonishment.

"Look out!" roared Templeton. "Smash him, Chico! That's the way! Mind his grip, boy! Keep clear of him!"

Chico Morgan was a wonderful fighter. When that untamed gorilla came flying through the air in an endeavour to get a grip upon the white man, Chico would dodge and duck in a manner that surprised us. When the Panther's long arms went out like the muscular limbs of the *simia wurmbii*, or giant orang-utan, Chico would slip away from them like a light-toed dancing master, planting his fists upon the face of the savage as he floundered after him. That silvered face, that was so distorted that it resembled the face of a Malayan devil, could not frighten the American. He never funk'd the onslaught. Left and right jabs, swings, and uppercuts crashed upon the Dyak's face, and Templeton and I roared applause till the jungle echoed. The big Englishman was nearly crazy with excitement as he hopped around the ring and encouraged Chico to greater efforts.

"Now you've got him!" he roared, as the Panther

staggered beneath a tornado of blows that Morgan delivered. "In the eyes, comrade! Blind him and you can do what you like with him!"

And Chico was blinding the Panther effectively. The Dyak was discovering that the American was as slippery as an eel, and Chico's blows were fast closing the little black eyes that resembled marbles of jade in that peculiar silvered face. And the big savage understood that victory was slipping away from him at that moment. He was becoming tired, and the terrific punching that Chico had administered was beginning to tell.

"Don't let up on him!" yelled Templeton. "Swing in the right! The right!"

Morgan measured the giant as he made another blind rush, the white man's big fist landed squarely on the brown man's chin, and the Spotted Panther dropped upon the grass.

Red opened his mouth to give a cry of triumph, but the cry was choked back. The big lieutenant of the Dyak chief had sprung toward Chico with an uplifted kris in his right hand, and Templeton acted with a swiftness that was extraordinary. The Great Parong of Buddha flashed in the sunlight, it fell like a flame upon the murderous savage, and the lieutenant dropped upon his knees, his head split from crown to chin.

It was at that moment I noticed Nao for the first time since the start of the battle. She worked her way through the crowd that seemed to be stricken dumb by the happenings, and clasping Templeton by the arm, she spoke to him rapidly.

"She's right!" cried Red. "Don't let him up, Morgan! Kill him!"

Chico wiped the perspiration from his face as he stood with legs apart waiting for the big savage to get upon his feet.

"Kill him!" I screamed. "There are no rules! Kill him!"

Morgan smiled faintly as he heard our shouts, but he made no move toward the fallen Panther. There were no rules to that battle, but Chico could not bring himself to strike an antagonist on the ground. With the eyes of the mob upon him he stood with legs apart, swaying slowly backward and forward, ready to carry on the fight when the big Dyak got to his feet.

The Panther rose slowly. For quite two minutes he crouched upon his hams, then he hurled himself upon Chico. The impact knocked Morgan to the ground, and as the crowd surged in upon the cleared space, the two fought and writhed upon the grass, each trying for a grip upon the throat of the other. Red swung the Great Sword to clear a circle, and



the wild-eyed mob sprang back from its touch. To them it was a sacred thing that must not be brought into contact with common clay.

The two on the ground thrashed about like a pair of huge pythons. Over and over they rolled, the fingers of each groping blindly for a throat grip, and in a silence that was more terrible than the noise made by the bull-roarer, we stood and watched them.

Slowly the Panther wormed himself uppermost, and the fingers of steel foraged for Chico's throat. Red Templeton cursed softly as he leaned forward. In the strained faces of the Dyaks we saw the effect of the advantage which their chief had gained. They knew the strength that lay in those fingers and as they closed upon Chico's neck a sigh of wonder and relief went up from the crowd.

Templeton, his big jaw thrust out, his eyes blazing, hung above the two, while the fingers of the Panther slowly throttled the life out of Morgan.

"Chico!" shrieked Red. "Give him the knee! The knee, man! Look! Here's the sword!"

I believe it was the sight of the Great Parong that worked the miracle. I'm sure it was. Red thrust the handle of the weapon toward Chico, and it seemed to fire him. We knew by the flash in his eyes that he was going to make a supreme effort. Slowly, very slowly, he worked his knees up beneath



the stomach of the Panther, then with a convulsive thrust forward, he broke the death grip, rolled completely over and drove his fingers deep into the throat of the leprous giant!

"Hold him, you bulldog!" roared Templeton. "Stick to him! Don't let up on him!"

The fight was over then. The muscles of the Panther relaxed, his mouth opened, and his mighty chest collapsed. Chico unloosed his grip, got upon his hands and knees, lifted himself wearily to his feet, then reeled forward into the arms of Templeton and the Golden One.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PROPHETESS

**I**T SEEMED to us that the inferno was unloosed following the defeat of the Panther. Whether the hag's sermon regarding our identity made the crowd crazy to touch us, or whether the defeat of the chief made them anxious to lay their hands upon the man who had defeated him, we could not tell, but the packed mass upon the clearing swarmed in upon us, their hands outstretched, their mouths open as they made a peculiar noise that was not unlike the sound they produced when the Great Sword was paraded on the night of the Bloody Moon.

"They'll smother Morgan!" I cried. "Keep them back and give him air!"

Templeton lowered Chico to the ground, seized the Great Parong and struck with the flat of the blade at the clawing forms that swept in upon us. The hag, who was older than the ruins of Pnom Preen, had climbed upon the shoulders of the massed savages, and her thin voice could be heard above the cries of all the others. It was her hour of triumph.

She had told the Panther that we were spirits, and now that Chico had defeated the brown chief she was thrusting herself in the spotlight with all the power at her command.

The mob fell back before the sword, and Nao spoke rapidly to Red.

"Where will we take him?" I asked.

"Nao thinks the cave is the best," said Templeton. "It is safer in case of trouble. Besides, it's considered the abode of spirits, so we'll be let alone."

"How will we get him there?" I asked.

"Hold the sword!" cried Templeton. "Hit them back, Lenford! Hit them back!"

I could barely lift the weapon with the strength of my two hands, but the mere movement of the blade made the terrified savages fall back. Templeton stooped down, put his tremendous arms around the unconscious Chico, and lifted him to his shoulders.

"To the cave, Lenford!" he roared. "Knock them back! Swing it, man! Swing it!"

I look back and wonder at that day. The place was an inferno. That old Jezebel ran along upon the shoulders of the mob, and she screamed orders at us that made my blood run cold, although I could hardly understand a word that she was saying.

"What's wrong with her?" cried Templeton.

"Ask Nao!" I roared.

Red, striding forward with as much unconcern as if Chico were a baby, put the question to the Golden One and then translated her answer.

"She wants us to go and work the magic of closing up the Mouths of Boorsh," he explained. "A human sacrifice is necessary, and they've got some one for the job."

"I hope Chico is well enough to bolt with us to-night," I said. "Another twenty-four hours in this place will send me insane."

We reached the opening of the little cave, and Templeton lowered Chico and carried him inside. Nao had managed to secure a bamboo notch full of cold water, and while I swung the sword to keep the horde from the ledge in front of the refuge, Templeton and the Golden One bathed Morgan's face with the cold water.

"He's coming round!" shouted Red. "Keep them back! He'll be right in a few minutes!"

I stooped for a moment to get confirmation of the good news, and as I peered into the place, Chico's lids flickered and he looked up. For a moment he stared at us stupidly, as if the recollection of the fight had been swept from his mind, then a look of horror flashed into his blue eyes and he made an effort to speak.

"What is it?" asked Templeton.

"Is he — is he dead?" he gasped.

"I think so," answered Red.

"Make sure," gurgled Chico. "Make sure! Kill him! He's the fiend himself!"

It was curious how we overlooked the Panther in the mad wind-up of that battle royal. The condition of Chico, and the stampede of the crowd, had thrust him momentarily from our mind, and it was only Morgan's imploring cry that made us recognize our ignorance regarding the outcome.

Templeton looked up at me when he saw the fear in Chico's eyes. "Run back, Lenford! Drive the Big Sword into him if ——— Here let me go!"

Red seized the sword, and swinging it above his head, charged madly down the slope. The hag was still calling upon us to come and perform our mission of closing the Mouths of Boorsh, while the mob was helping her out in a refrain which she put at the end of her shrill appeals. The clearing was a sea of brown faces all turned toward the opening of the cave.

Templeton reached the spot where the battle had taken place, turned and sprang back up the rocky slope.

"They've carried him away!" he cried. "Keep a sharp lookout! If he is alive we'll have trouble by the bucketful!"

Chico groaned when Templeton gave him the news, and the light of terror flashed again into his eyes. The battle with the primitive brute had unnerved him, and he watched the opening of the cave as if he expected the Panther to leap in upon us.

"Don't worry about him!" cried Templeton. "If he's alive he won't be able to get about for a day or two. But I don't think he is alive. You ——"

"He is alive," interrupted Chico. "I feel that he's alive, Templeton! And he can recover from that fight in one tenth the time you or I would take. Watch for him! Watch for him!"

"We'll watch," said Red. "Keep quiet and rest yourself."

Nao brought a preparation made from crocodile fat and extract of gum leaves and we rubbed this over Morgan's body. The marks of the Panther's claws were everywhere. If the big fiend lacked the science to make his punches effective he did not lack the strength to leave his fingermarks where he took a grip. Chico had the appearance of a man who had been mauled by a bear, and Templeton cursed softly as he rubbed in the liniment.

"He's a gorilla," he growled. "We were mad to accept his offer."

"He's a devil," muttered Chico. "Keep a watch for him, Lenford. If you see him coming, get me



on my feet and give me a gun. Put that revolver here within reach."

We placed Morgan upon a bed of leaves that a few young Dyaks had gathered by Nao's orders, and the girl sat down beside him and fed him with rice water. The Golden One had evidently thrown her lot in with ours since the fight, and she tried to do all she could for the battered Chico. Outside on the clearing the mob was still howling, while the ancient hag was imploring us with extended arms to fulfill the prophecy regarding the Mouths of Boorsh.

"Holy St. Michael! what will be the end of it all?" gasped Templeton. "Have they all gone crazy?"

Red lifted up the Great Sword, thinking it might silence them, but the action only increased the uproar. The hag had worked them up to an insane pitch with her talk about the prophecy, and nothing would silence them. They were firmly convinced that we were not ordinary mortals. No man in their recollection had ever fought the Spotted Panther single-handed and remained alive to tell the story, so Chico's achievement had stamped the prophecy of the old crone with the hallmark of truth.

The Golden One, wild-eyed and nervous, came out of the cave, and Templeton asked her to translate the words of the whining hag. The girl did so, and Red turned her words into English for my bene-

fit. I think the real poison of that place began to seep into our bodies just then. I know that I was more afraid as I listened to the words of the ancient hag than I had ever been before. The surroundings were destroying the bonds that bound us to civilization. We had a fear that something inside our heads would give way, and that we would go down and howl with the mob. The hands of the jungle were reaching out for us. The smells of the jungle were diving into our brains and dragging out the desires of dead ancestors who fought with the dinosaur and the glyptodon, and the skin of our necks prickled with the fear of the unseen.

"This is what she says," cried Templeton. "Come and close the mouths that are ever hungry! The mouths that wait for food! The mouths that cry in the nights when nothing comes to them. Close them! We hear them in the darkness crying for our men and women. Their lips move as we pass by. They reach out and swallow our brave ones. Close them! Close them! The sacrifice is ready, why do you wait?"

That old hag must have cried that out in a tongue that our ancestors used ten thousand years before. I'm sure she must have. As Red translated it to me I seemed to grope into my mind and dig out the very words she was using. We were in a backwater

of the world where nothing moved, and where the tongues of ten thousand generations had cried aloud the supplication made by the hag with the eyes that belonged to the Stone Age.

"What are we to do?" I asked.

"Sit down and wait," answered Templeton. "I'd be a darn big failure if I tried to turn a morass into solid land. That's a job that is outside my line of business."

"Can't we do something to quiet them?"

"Nothing will quiet them," snapped Templeton. "That old witch has driven them insane."

The hag turned her back upon us and screamed to the crowd, and a score of men immediately detached themselves from the packed mass and disappeared in the strip of thick undergrowth that separated the clearing from the *kampong*.

"Ask the Golden One the meaning of it!" I cried. "Where have they gone?"

Templeton put the question, and turned to me with a grim smile upon his face. "We'll have to work up an excuse of some sort," he said. "She has sent them to bring the sacrifice out for our inspection. Nao thinks that there is danger in their present attitude unless we can do something to cool them off."

"We might object to the sacrifice," I muttered.

"We could say that he was too fat or too thin according to how he looked. If we got three or four days' grace to fatten him or thin him down it would give Chico a chance to get in travelling form."

"You've struck the right idea," said Templeton. "We must find fault with him. I guess it's one of the Tring tribe that they have captured, so it's a certainty that he is thin."

The bull-roarer started to throb in the village, and we understood from the shouts of the crowd that the sacrifice was being brought toward the clearing.

Templeton thrust his head in the opening of the cave as Chico cried out a question regarding the ruction.

"It's the sacrifice that you will have to offer to the Mouths of Boorsh," explained Templeton. "They are bringing him over for our inspection. Lenford and I are going to protest against his size, and that will give you time to get well."

The racket came closer, the guard crashed through the undergrowth, fought their way through the crowd, halted at the foot of the slope, and pushed their captive forward. Templeton and I gave a joint cry of astonishment. Standing in front of us, a picture of grief and misery, was Gung, the Hindu!

The unfortunate wretch blinked stupidly as if

doubtful whether we were real or part of the nightmare which surrounded him, but when he saw the Great Parong in Templeton's hands, a flash of hope spread across his lean features.

"Sahib!" he shrieked. "Save me, sahib! Save me!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CALL OF THE ORANG CAPELLO

**WE** WERE never more impressed with the tremendous happenings of the preceding sixty hours than when we looked upon the mud-spattered Hindu. It took an effort to recall the stampede at the Place of Evil Winds and the manner in which Gung had left us. Into the time that intervened between our first meeting with the *White Mias* and the appearance of the sacrifice we had crammed so much adventure that we looked back on that night as if it was in a remote past.

Templeton walked down the slope, took his knife from its sheath and cut the rattan bonds that bound the Hindu. The hag saw in the action an intimation that we were willing to take immediate action in the matter of the ceremony, and she screamed her anticipations to the crowd. Waving her skinny arms she yelled her belief till the jungle echoed with her screams and the yells of joy with which her words were greeted.

Chico cried out a question and I answered him.



"Gung has come back," I said. "They caught him in the jungle. You are supposed to sacrifice him to the Mouths of Boorsh as a final offering before you close them up."

"They can go to the devil!" he growled. "If I can walk I'm going to quit this camp the moment it is dark."

Templeton put his hand upon Gung's shoulder and pushed him up the slope to the spot where Nao and I were standing. The Hindu was shivering with terror. His thin, spiderlike legs wobbled fearfully as Red pushed him up the slight incline.

"Save me, sahib!" he muttered. "Take me from them!"

"We'll try to," said Red. "We want somebody to come along and get us away from them."

Templeton explained to Nao that he wished her to inform the hag and the howling mob that Gung, although eminently fitted for a sacrifice, was at the moment too thin for the position, and that three or four days of good feeding would be necessary to make him acceptable to the gurgling mouths of the morass. The Golden One delivered the message and nearly created a riot in so doing. The screaming hag wanted immediate action, and her wild cries so excited the crowd that fifty warriors charged up the slope.

"Don't shoot!" cried Templeton. "The sword creates a much bigger sensation. See what effect I can produce by winging this lanky savage in the lead."

"But the blowpipes!" I cried. "Look out! The man in the lead is going to send a dart at us."

The tall, thin runner leading the mob lifted his *sumpitan*, but he wasn't quick enough. A revolver bullet struck him in the chest, he rolled down the slope, and the crowd came to a sudden stop. Vainly the hag implored them to rush up the incline and compel us to make an immediate sacrifice of Gung, but the natives were cautious. They were anxious that the Mouths of Boorsh should be closed forever, but they were in no hurry to lose their lives in forcing us to perform the miracle. While she screamed they retreated sullenly, and Gung stiffened his thin legs in an endeavour to appear courageous.

"They will kill us!" he cried. "They have made up their minds to kill us, sahib!"

"We've got something to say in that matter," said Templeton grimly. "Keep your nerve up, Gung. They're not as bad as the White *Mias*."

A tremor passed over the Hindu's frame, and his face muscles worked convulsively. The fear that had gripped him the night that the orang-utans had stampeded him and the ten Dyaks had not been

worked out of his system by the succeeding dangers through which he had passed.

The revolver shot had brought the battered Chico from his bed of leaves, and he peered through the opening of the cave at the throng.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"They're in a hurry to get us busy," answered Templeton. "I've explained that Gung isn't fat enough to offer up to-day, but they're insistent."

Chico laid himself down with his head through the opening, and the mob, catching sight of his face, whined in chorus. The hag stopped her screaming and retired to the shadow of a big tapang tree. The midday heat was oppressive, and the peculiar nasal whine had a somnolent effect upon us as we sat and watched the hundreds who squatted upon their haunches and stared up at us.

The odours of the jungle and the morass crept up around us and increased our desire for sleep. Body o' me! weren't we sleepy! For the two preceding nights we had little or no rest, and that singsong noise, together with the stupor produced by the heat and the odours, made us long to shut our eyes and sleep for a year.

Twice I rolled over against the rocky wall of the cavern, but the watchful Templeton shook me gently and made me open my eyes.

"Don't go to sleep," he growled. "If we shut our eyes it will be our last sleep."

I suppose there was some hypnotic power in the stare of those hundreds. There must have been. They might have willed us to sleep, and helped out their mental suggestion with that nasal whine that made it impossible for any one to keep his eyes open. I'm sure they did. I felt that their nasal chant was killing my power of thought, and as I stared at them I imagined that the squatting hundreds were kin to the great silent trees of tapang, mohor, and kaladang. I had a feeling that everything around us was alive — the trees, the morass, the mudbanks — and that we were the enemies of everything within sight because we had put a veneer of civilization upon ourselves that made it impossible for us to understand the jungle and the things that were of the jungle.

It was a punch from Templeton that dragged me out of the land of dreams, and I sprang up in alarm. The squatting hundreds were still in their places, but now their faces were turned away from us. A noise in the jungle had attracted their attention, and the noise was one that made us wonder concerning its meaning. It was the noise of the bull-roarer, not the continuous noise that we had heard on previous occasions, but short, intermittent throbbings that

charged the hot afternoon with a feeling of sinister dread.

For a full five minutes the squatting hundreds remained inactive, their faces turned to the spot from which the noise came, then in groups of five and ten they stood up and slipped quietly into the undergrowth.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

Red turned to the Golden One, whose turquoise-bordered *kabayah* that rose and fell with her quick breathing seemed to tell us that something unusual was afoot. The girl's big eyes watched the disappearing men, then she turned toward us and whispered a few words in Portuguese.

"She says it is the Panther," said Templeton. "That is the call of the *orang capello*, or head man, and no one can use it except the chief or his successor. And there is no successor elected."

One after the other the groups stole from the clearing, and we sat and watched them. The sound of the roarer awakened Chico from the doze he had fallen into and he dragged himself upon the ledge and listened. Templeton gave him Nao's explanation of the racket, and Morgan's fingers tightened upon the butt of his revolver.

"I knew he wasn't dead," he said quietly. "I

hadn't the strength in my fingers to finish him. I don't think any one could finish him."

"We'll try him with lead next time," snapped Templeton. "We should have used it on the beggar this morning."

The mob dwindled down till but half a score remained. These squatted in the clearing till another and louder signal came from the tree masses, then they stood up and slipped away, leaving only the ancient hag to watch us.

"She's afraid to go, I think," said Templeton. "She denounced the Panther because he wouldn't believe that we were spirits."

"Let Nao speak to her," said Chico. "Ask her who she is?"

Red asked the girl and she answered quickly.

"She says that the old one is the Mother of the Years," translated Templeton. "She is older than the banyan clump in front of the *kampong*."

"Get her views on our position," urged Chico. "We can't be any worse off than we are."

The Golden One, at Templeton's suggestion, lifted her voice and spoke to the hag. She spoke to her gently, and the old woman came slowly forward, beating her bare and withered breasts with the palms of her hands. That crone made us feel as old as the Green Buddha of Yamada as she came toward us.



She exuded an atmosphere of age. When she stopped at the foot of the slope we seemed to slip into the past and see things that we had no knowledge of till that minute.

Nao spoke to Templeton, and Red lifted the Great Parong of Buddha.

"She wants to see the sword," he said. "She asked Nao if she could come closer to it."

"Sure she can," cried Chico. "Don't give it into her hands though. I bet she can run faster than a jackrabbit, and we'd look foolish chasing her through the trees if she took a notion to flit with it."

Red smiled as he asked the Golden One to tell the ancient dame to come forward. "She hasn't a possible chance of getting away with it," he said. "We're going to take it to Benares if a thousand Panthers and a thousand hags try to block the way."

The old woman approached with her withered hands upon her bare head, her black eyes fixed upon the big blade. Up the slope she came slowly, fell upon her knees when within a yard of Templeton, and timidly put out a hand to touch the golden cobra that formed the hilt. Her lips moved rapidly, but we could not catch the words.

Very slowly the thin claw moved to the great blade and when her fingers touched the first letters of the

verse that was written in Hindustanee, she looked questioningly at Red.

"She looks as if she wants you to read it," said Chico. "Perhaps it has been a puzzle to them."

The hag spoke to Nao, and the Golden One translated her remarks.

"That is what she wants to know," said Temp-leton. "Nao says that she knows what is written there, but that she wants to see if we know."

"Try her out," cried Chico. "Repeat the first two lines to the Golden One, and ask Mrs. Methuselah to give you the next two."

Red repeated the first two lines of the verse reading: "I, who have parted the planets," and when Nao started to translate them to the ancient hag we noticed the surprise which flashed over the face of the crone. Her old body seemed to quiver with the shock she received, and her little eyes flashed like bits of black opal.

"She knows it!" cried Chico. "Ask her for the next two lines."

The Golden One put the question and that old beldame threw up her head and started to chant. We knew that she was chanting that poem before Nao translated a word to us. And it was wonderful how we did know. Like her words about the Mouths of Boorsh, we seemed to get the translation from the

subconscious brain, and when she got to the last line we joined in and shouted in English, "With Faith I can build them at will," while she gave the rendering in Malay.

"That's mighty wonderful," remarked Templeton. "They have no records. This has been handed down for years. It might have been told to them by some Buddhist priest that Enrique de Gama kidnapped when he thieved the treasure."

Chico took a full breath and looked at the jungle. The afternoon sun was slipping behind the trees, and a loneliness that wrenched at our souls closed in upon the place. The bull-roarer had long ago ceased to disturb the stillness, and as we alternately watched the hag and the jungle, we longed for the atmosphere of civilization and the feeling of security that comes with law and order.

"I'd give a little sum to be walking up Broadway right now," growled Chico. "While I was dreaming just now I thought I was sitting out a show at the Hippodrome with a vision of a late supper in the distance. What is her ladyship going to do?"

The hag slipped down the slope and made a wild rush for the clearing. Her thin legs moved in a way that made us think of Morgan's remark of a few minutes before as we watched her sprint.

"What's up with her?" asked Templeton.

Gung, who had sat like a man in a trance from the moment that Red had cut the rattan bonds from his arms, thrust his head forward and listened intently.

"They are coming back, sahib," he said quietly. "They are all coming. She heard them and she ran to meet them."

Gung was right. His sharper ears had caught the sounds of the returning Dyaks, and we made ready for action. If the Panther was alive and able to get about, it was a certainty that we would not be left unmolested for long, and as a running battle was out of the question on account of the half crippled state of Chico, the cave was the only spot where we could fight with any advantage.

"Make Nao get inside out of harm's way," said Morgan. "I've got a notion that the Panther has worked out his plans at the conference."

The mob burst from the undergrowth at the spot where the savages had disappeared, and it was then we began to have some idea of the activity of the ancient hag who knew the verse on the blade. She was skipping along in front of the mob, shrieking loudly, her back turned to us, her skinny arms outstretched as if she would arrest their approach.

"She's trying to save us," said Chico.

"Sure," growled Red. "She's telling them that we know the verse upon the Great Parong."

I guess Templeton was right about her efforts. It seemed as if her screaming was done on our behalf, but it did little good at that moment. The Dyaks thrust her out of the way, but still shrieking and waving her skinny hands she rushed ahead of the leaders, a veritable fountain of abuse and energy.

"They're coming for us this time," said Red. "Get inside the cave, Gung. You might sit near that hole in the corner and drop a rock on the head of any one who tries to climb up through it."

Chico, bruised and battered, groaned with the pain of his injuries as he stretched himself in the shelter of a boulder and rested the barrel of his Winchester rifle upon the rock.

"I'm too sick to run, so I've got to stand," he said grimly. "If we had enough ammunition it wouldn't be —— Look! Look!"

We looked in time to see a white face glance for an instant from the leafy trees at the far end of the clearing, but the face had disappeared before Chico fired. We got a thrill of horror from that glimpse. The leprous face of the Spotted Panther chilled us, and we forgot for a moment the approaching mob.

"You missed him!" cried Red. "Look out! These beggars have started with the blowpipes!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### WHEN TEMPLETON FOUGHT ALONE

THE memory of the poisoned dart that had nearly put Chico out of all worldly trouble made us shoot to kill as the savages lifted their blowpipes to blaze away at us. We were more afraid of their using the blowpipes than we would have been if they were using Winchesters. A respectable lead bullet kills a man in a gentlemanly way, but the dart that can take a man's life by merely touching the end of his finger creates cold chills for the person who is under attack.

"Take the middle section, Lenford!" cried Templeton. "Chico will work the right. Wait till they get to the bottom of the slope, and for the love of heaven don't miss!"

The pace of the warriors increased to a run when they were near our end of the clearing, and with *sum-pitans* ready to discharge the deadly darts at any part of our bodies not protected by the boulders, they rushed at the slope. Templeton thrust his hat upon the blade of the Great Sword and pushed



it up over the shelter, and as the leaders sent a volley of darts in its direction, we opened fire.

"Give it to them!" roared Chico. "That's the style! Keep it up, boys! Keep it up!"

Three warriors in the lead toppled over from the effects of our first round, but three deaths were nothing to the mob that surged behind. Those in the rear knew nothing of any fatalities in the front, and they swept the leaders up the slope.

"Make it as hot as you can!" yelled Templeton. "Give it to them!"

Our only hope lay in taking Templeton's advice, and as fast as we could load we fired at the swarm scrambling up the slope. But two revolvers and a rifle were nothing to a mob of savages who were thirsting for our blood. The occasional death yell of one of their number was lost in the uproar, and they poured up the rise like a brown wave, the rays of the westering sun glinting upon their oiled bodies.

Templeton cursed as the savages sprang forward. Our ammunition would be exhausted in a few seconds and what would happen after that we had no desire to contemplate. The natives had flung the blow-pipes away as they came to close quarters, and the razor-edged parongs flashed in the sunlight.

Templeton fired his last cartridge, flung the revolver at the face of the leader, then, springing to

his feet, he seized the Great Sword of Buddha and swung it around his head. The thing cut through the air like chain lighting, cut through the neck of the brute in the lead and maimed the man immediately behind him. Glory to strength! A poet with a tongue like Homer should have been there to see Red Templeton at that moment. I shall conjure up the picture in the days when my blood runs cold, and I shall thrill like a boy who reads for the first time the story of Leonidas the Spartan. That blade was made for blood. It was thirsty for it. It leaped at the faces of the screaming fiends as if it had the thirst of three centuries upon it. No wonder that it pulled down kings and put in their places strong armed adventurers who knew how to use it. Roland's enchanted sword was dwarfed by that Parong of Buddha. Chico and I got upon our knees and roared like madmen. We forgot the darts from the blowpipes. We forgot all danger. We only knew that a big, red-blooded white man was scaring the hearts out of a thousand savages by the way he hacked and drove a blade that Rolf the Ganger would have given a dukedom for.

A great fear clutched the Dyaks. Their little parongs fell from their hands as Red rushed upon them. They broke before his attack. With yells of terror they turned and fled down the slope, and

Templeton howled like the wizard dog upon Mount Sai as he chased them. I cannot write it as I saw it! I cannot tell it now in a way that will make the reader's blood glow as mine glows every time I run before my mental eye the film that pictures Templeton standing like a red-headed viking and dealing death in all directions.

"By the bones of Stonewall Jackson! he'll chase them into the jungle!" roared Chico. "Red! Red! Come back, you fool! Come back! Templeton! Templeton! Catch him, Lenford! Catch him!"

I rushed down the slope calling at the top of my voice, and as I reached the clearing, he heard me. He was crazed with victory just then. His eyes had a light in them that one never sees in these cold-blooded days when men kill each other at a range of half a mile.

He stopped and looked at me as if I was a stranger, while the howling Dyaks, thankful to get the opportunity to escape, fled across the clearing. For a moment he regarded me in puzzled wonder, then he laughed and looked at the dripping blade.

"That was a great fight, Lenford," he said. "The golden cobra has had a drink at last."

I walked back with him up the slope, and Chico Morgan clawed himself upright and gripped Red's

hand without speaking. They were two great men. By the Beard of Mahomet! yes! I wrote when describing their first fight in Banjermassin that I was doubtful which was the better fighter of the two, and I am still in doubt now that I have described their great battles. Chico had put up a wonderful single-handed fight with the Panther that morning, but I hope I may dream of Red Templeton's sword work through all eternity.

Gung, the Hindu, crawled out of the cave, and looked at Red with eyes of astonishment. The Hindu had thought that his last hour had arrived when the leaders of the mob were swarming over the boulders behind which we were entrenched, and the defeat of the enemy was nothing short of a miracle. He dropped upon his knees in front of Templeton and bowed his head before the great red sword.

Nao, looking as if the fear for our safety had made her more beautiful than ever, stepped out of the cave and looked admiringly from Morgan to Templeton, and from Templeton back to Morgan. To see the Panther defeated in the morning and to see the Panther's horde put to flight in the afternoon were sights that made the Golden One feel strangely proud of the alliance that she had formed at the little stone cross in the jungle.

For the space of a minute she looked at the two giants as if trying to think up something complimentary to their prowess, then she stood up between the two and, placing a little hand upon the bare shoulder of each, she lisped one word.

"Leesbon," she murmured.

"Ay, Lisbon!" cried Chico. "We'll start to-night, my girl! If I can't walk, Gung must carry me. We'll start to-night! The whole crew of us! We'll start for Broadway, Piccadilly, the Praco do Rocia, and every other place that there are bright lights shining!"

Templeton smiled at Chico's good humour, then he glanced at the jungle, from which came cries and yells, with an occasional throb of the concentrated essence of sound when the bull-roarer was let loose. "We'll surely have to make an attempt to get away to-night," he said. "They'll get their nerve back in a few hours, and we can't fight them at long range without ammunition. We had luck this time. They were so thick around us that they hadn't room to use their blowpipes."

"Sure we'll go to-night!" cried Chico. "I've an idea that to-night is the night that Fate has picked out for our retreat. You don't understand me, Nao, but it's a lump of wisdom I'm handing out."

"Leesbon," murmured the girl.

"Yes, it's Lisbon," cried the delighted Morgan. "We're off to Philadelphia in the morning!"

Templeton was staring at the Great Sword that flashed back the last rays of the setting sun. "We'll never part with it, Morgan," he said quietly.

"We never will," answered Chico. "We'll only show it to them in that old Temple of Arungzebee. Show it to them at ten dollars a head, but they'll never get possession of it. Not even if the British Government wants to make you a rajah, Red!"

"No, nor a hundred times a rajah!" muttered Templeton. "A man who owns this is greater than a king."

"If he can swing it like you can," said Chico. "Never mind, it will be dark in a few minutes, and we'll be getting ready to give them a lesson in the art of disappearing."

The sun slipped out of sight, and the wings of night came down out of Asia and enfolded the clearing. The thick darkness washed out the outlines of the big trees, and the noises of prowling things came from the undergrowth.

"They're bound to have a strong guard at the crossing where we met the One-Who-Never-Slept," muttered Chico.

"We'll have to chance it," said Red. "If you can walk we'll try our luck."



"I'll crawl to get out of this place," growled Morgan. "I've had enough of the jungle to last me for the rest of my life."

The Golden One was brought into the consultation, and Templeton asked her advice on the best way of reaching the spot where the swinging rope hung above the channel of bubbling mud. The moon would rise within an hour, and although Nao asserted that we would need the light to get to the swinging ropes and thence across the Mouths of Boorsh, we decided that we would leave the cave under cover of darkness. Our position upon the cliff gave us too much prominence, and if we attempted to move out after the moon had risen, our retreat would be noticed by the watchful eyes of the Dyaks.

"We'll get down to the bottom of the cliff and wait there," said Templeton. "Then we can go forward the moment we have sufficient light."

"Come on!" cried Chico. "Lead the way with the sword, Red. We'll follow after you."

Templeton picked up the Great Parong and moved down the narrow path, and we fell into line behind him. It was the start home, and I experienced a thousand thrills as we went forward. If we could cross the Mouths of Boorsh in safety and reach the banks of the Barito River, we would make Banjer-

massin inside three weeks, and my heart pounded mightily as I thought of the stir we would cause in the waiting Orient when the news of our discovery would go forth to the world. The Cup of Everlasting Fire which the opium-dulled Courtney had possessed himself of was nothing to that sword. Nothing at all! The cup was beautiful, but the Great Parong was a living Force! Yes! it was alive! If it had spoken to us like the magic sword spoke to Roland we would not have been surprised.

The Golden One spoke to Templeton as we stepped down the narrow path, and Morgan asked for a translation.

"What did she say?" asked Chico.

"She wants us to stop at the stone cross so that she can make a farewell prayer there."

"Stop by all means," answered Morgan. "I'm not given much to prayers, but if we get as far as the cross with our heads on our shoulders I'll do some praying myself. And I'll make Gung pray too. He's the sacrifice that missed being sacrificed."

The Hindu whispered a prayer to Buddha into the night air. Gung was frightened clean out of his wits, and his teeth chattered as he walked along. That place of mystery and death so affected him that he was unable to answer a simple question.

Very slowly and very quietly we descended the cliff upon the side nearest the *kampong*, following the path which Nao had raced along when she acquainted us with the work of the man-hound on that first morning of our arrival. We could not see an object three feet in front of us, and Red reluctantly gave up his place in the lead to the girl, who was surer-footed and familiar with the locality.

We reached the level ground at last, and halted. The faintest glow showed above the line of the jungle, and we crept into the undergrowth to await the rising of the moon.

"Don't speak!" whispered Templeton. "You can't tell what the beggars will be up to."

In silence we sat and waited, our ears noting the thousand and one minor sounds that came from the jungle. The occasional cry of a monkey and the hoot of an owl came to our ears, while now and then we heard the squeal of a wild pig that had been trapped in one of the bamboo pig traps which the cunning Kyan builds upon the path of the porkers who raid his paddy patch.

I think it was the Golden One who first discovered a sinister significance in the faint crackling of twigs and dry grasses that came to our ears. Nao had remarkable hearing. She could hear sounds that even Gung could not detect, and as we crouched

in the darkness she conveyed to us the intelligence that the enemy was moving upon the cave.

We obtained the information through our own ears before many minutes had passed. The night was alive! From the grassy clearing, upon the fringe of which we sat and waited, came a rustling sound that suggested the passage of a score of pythons moving slowly over dry grass. The savages were crawling toward the slope!

Templeton put his face close to Nao's and suggested an immediate move, but the Golden One had objections to offer. In a breathless whisper she explained that many of the headhunters would approach from the *kampong*, and that we would move directly across their path if we made for the Mouths of Boorsh. Templeton translated her objections in a whisper.

"We must wait till they climb the slope," he breathed. "Then we must run."

We guessed we would have to run mighty hard as we sat and listened to the advance of the Panther's warriors. The sinister sound made by the bodies as they moved over the grass convinced us that every man in the *kampong* had been gathered for the attack, and as the faint glow from the rising moon spread like a silvery mist over the place, we could dimly discern the sea of moving bodies. And

that army of attack gave us cold chills as we crouched in the velvety shadows and watched it moving snakily forward.

The light grew stronger, and it was then that we were convinced that the Golden One was right in protesting against our plan of moving straight upon the spot where the ropes swung over the channel of mud. From the direction of the *kampong* a second detachment was advancing to the attack, and as we listened to the sounds that told of their approach, we understood that we were directly between the two droves of crawling men. We would have to remain perfectly quiet till the detachment from the village was climbing the cliff, then, as Nao advised, slip quietly away.

"Glory be! we'll have to hustle some," breathed Chico. "When they find that the nest is empty they'll fine-comb the jungle."

"Ssh! don't make a noise!" whispered Templeton. "Be ready now! Give Morgan a hand, Lenford. Step lightly and move as fast as you can."

We got upon our feet and waited for the word. At that moment we could make out the figures of the foe quite distinctly. The ground at the base of the cliff swarmed with them, but it was evident that the dead bodies which bore testimony to the strength of Templeton's right arm caused the

attacking party to move very cautiously as they approached the opening to the cave. As we stepped softly out of the shadows the leading savages were moving at a snail's pace, and we prayed fervently that an attack of funk would keep them from making the final rush till we had reached the place of the swinging ropes.

"Now," whispered Templeton, "follow me closely and ——"

A cry broke from the mob upon the cliff — a cry of concentrated terror, and we sprang back into the protecting shadows.

"What is it?" asked Chico. "What are they saying?"

Nao pointed with her finger in the direction of the Mouths of Boorsh, and we understood what had brought the wail of fear from the mob. The rim of the moon appeared above the jungle, and the moon was the color of blood!

"Great Scott!" cried Morgan. "The Moon of Blood! And the beggars can't parade the Great Parong because they haven't got it!"

Their helplessness seemed to strike the head-hunters as they stared at the alarming spectacle. The goddess of the night was angry, and they had no way of appeasing her anger. From time immemorial they had paraded the Great Sword around



the clearing when the red moon came up through the mists above the morass, but now the sword was in the hands of the enemy.

Curiously their fear of some terrible disaster overtaking them while they were in the open made them forget their nearness to the cave and the fact that their overwhelming numbers would make the recovery of the weapon an easy matter. The only desire in their primitive minds was to find a hiding-place from the angry eye of the moon, and they set about that matter with vigour. Above the groans of terror we heard the voice of the Panther ordering them forward, but the Panther ordered in vain. Their leader was mortal, but the red eye in the sky was something beyond their ken. They rose to their feet in a body, and with bloodcurdling shrieks dashed down the slope and into the jungle. Inside a minute the slope was empty, and only a faint moaning from the silent tree masses told us of the whereabouts of the terrified horde.

Chico gasped: "Did any one ever see the like of that? What are we to do now? Half the brutes bolted in the direction of the *kampong!*"

The Golden One started to sob, and Templeton tried to calm her. The girl blamed herself for the delay that had increased our dangers, and her grief was great.

"Tell her it wasn't her fault," said Chico. "We couldn't have reached the ford if we had gone before. We're safer where we are."

Templeton explained, and the girl dried her tears and joined in the whispered discussion which we held as to the best move. It was doubtful if the horde would return to the cliff after the moon had fought its way out of the vapour clouds that gave it the peculiar tinge, and we came to the conclusion that we would make an immediate attempt to reach the crossing place in spite of the dangers that were in our path.

"We can't go back!" said Chico. "We must go forward, and we might as well start at once. Hello! here's one of them coming back!"

Across the moonlit clearing raced a solitary figure, and we watched it with interest. Up the slope to the cave it ran nimbly, disappeared for an instant, then hopped through the opening, and came hurriedly down the path toward the spot where we were hiding.

"Now the game is up!" growled Red. "That inquisitive brute will yell the news to the night, and they'll be on our path like a pack of wolves."

The bold one came forward slowly, stopping every few paces and peering around. Our thoughts went back to the human bloodhound whose tracking work

had been stopped by the poisoned dart that had come from the jungle, and we wondered if the solitary wanderer was another gifted with the same faculties.

The trailing native stopped within four feet of our hiding-place, and we stared at the head that was thrust toward us. We recognized those shrivelled features. The pursuer was the hag — the ancient beldame that Nao had informed us was known as the Mother of the Years!

She spoke softly, and the Golden One gave a little gasp that told us that the penetrating eyes of the old woman had discovered our hiding-place. It may not have been her eyes. That old withered hag gave one the impression that nothing could be concealed from her. She had followed our track down the hill like the cripple had followed it the morning after our arrival.

"She sees us," said Chico. "You had better get Nao to speak to her. She's friendly to us."

Templeton spoke to the Golden One, and the girl translated his words to the Mother of the Years. Ay! she was Mother of the Centuries as well as the Years! She was Time itself, wrapped in parchment and defying natural laws by promenading around the jungle.

The old woman stepped into the shadows and

spoke rapidly to the girl. We understood a word here and there, and we were mighty anxious to hear the full translation from Red.

"What's the tale?" cried Morgan.

"The ropes are cut," answered Templeton. "There are two hundred of the natives on guard at the spot where the One-Who-Never-Slept met us, and there is no hope of us getting across by that route."

"Ask her if there is any other way?" said Chico.

Templeton passed the query along, and the hag moved closer to us before answering. She dropped upon her bony knees and fingered the sword with her claws, then she lifted up her voice and spoke in a dialect that Nao did not understand. I guess it was a dialect that no one understood but herself.

"Who the dickens is she speaking to?" cried Red. "She is asking questions of some one."

There was something about the woman's actions that upset Gung's stomach. When she put her questions — we knew that they were questions — the Hindu curled himself up like a whipped dog, and his teeth chattered as he watched her. I guess Gung's skin was more sensitive than ours, but our skins told us enough to make us creepy at that moment. It disconcerts one a little to have an old woman who looks as if she might have fought

with a glyptodon put questions to the empty atmosphere in a tongue that you have never heard before.

"Me for civilization after this," muttered Chico. "These giddy jungle-dwellers have got me feeling as foolish as a crocodile who has swallowed a broken bottle."

Four times that ancient dame fired the question at the velvety night, then she gave a gurgle of joy and turned quickly to the Golden One. Words poured from her shrivelled lips, and we could tell from the manner in which Nao clasped and unclasped her tapering fingers that she was receiving news that was of more than ordinary importance. We felt its importance before Nao translated a word of it to Templeton.

"Out with it!" cried Morgan. "Tell us, Red!"

Templeton listened till the girl had translated the hag's remarks, then he turned toward us. "Old Mother of the Years is going to take us through a secret passage that is beneath the channel of mud," he said. "It will bring us on to the island of rock from which we swung across by the rope. No one knows of it, not even the Panther. She calls it the Passage of the Living Light, and she says it hasn't been used for half a century."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PASSAGE OF THE GLOW-WORMS

I DO not know whether Templeton and Morgan were inclined to grip that old hag's hand and shake it, but I know I had the inclination. Yet it was an inclination that lacked the virility to convert itself into an act. I was afraid to touch the thin claw of the perambulating mummy, and I endeavoured to tender her my share of the thanks by nodding vigorously when she looked in my direction.

Gung was the only one who did not accept her proposition gleefully. The Hindu was afraid of the old woman, and he groaned fearfully as we stood up to follow her. Gung had become a confirmed pessimist, and he refused to see a ray of comfort in the offer.

"Never mind, Gung," said Chico. "We've still got a chance. Buck up, man! Buck up!"

The Mother of the Years started off in the direction of the *kampong*, and we followed her at a swift pace. That old woman was about the nim-



blest fossil we had ever seen. Judged by her face you would say that she had as much life in her as the trilobites they find in the Old Red Sandstone, but when she started to move you decided differently.

She turned to the right before we came within a hundred yards of the village, and moving swiftly through the thick undergrowth, we circled the attap houses of the Panther's followers and came out upon the edge of the Mouths of Boorsh at a point which we took to be a quarter of a mile distant from the spot where we had gained the shore on the night we crossed over. That place chilled us when we came close to it. The horrid, rumbling noise suggestive of an empty stomach of mammoth proportions came from it, and the eddying mud that quivered in the bright moonlight gave us creepy sensations that are indescribable. We didn't wonder at the intensity with which the hag prayed when she entreated us to close up those mouths. She had lived alongside that morass till the terror of the place had entered into her soul. And the Lord only knows how many she had seen swallowed up during her lifetime.

We coasted the shore of the sea of mud, walking in single file between a mass of nipa-palm and the slime. In the moonlight we could see distinctly

the long rocky island to which we had crossed under Nao's guidance, but on the spot where we then were it was much farther from the shore than it was at the point where the sleepless one had kept his watch. No rope could bridge the gulf of mud that separated us from it at the point where the hag brought us.

"I think she means to make us swim it," growled Chico. "I can't see how we are going to get to the island in any other way."

A wild howl came down the wind from the direction of the cliff, and we guessed that the Panther had infused enough courage into his horde to enable them to make another attack upon the cave. And we well understood what would follow the fruitless rush upon the empty chamber in the rock. As the moon rose beyond the haze which covered the Mouths of Boorsh we knew that the headhunters would find their courage, and they would then set out to scour the jungle in search of us.

"Tell Nao to make the old crone hurry," said Morgan. "If we're not mighty quick in finding some kind of a burrow to hide in we'll never carry the Big Sword to Benares."

The hag stopped as Chico finished speaking, carefully measured the distance between the butt of a tapang tree and the morass, then, walking to the very edge of the channel, she looked across the

sea of bubbling slime. There was no caked surface here like that upon which we had walked when crossing to the rocky island on the night we reached the *kampong*. The mud was alive! It bubbled up incessantly, and in the moonlight we stood and watched it swirl around in curious eddies as if the blades of a huge propeller were moving slowly a hundred fathoms beneath the surface.

The hag stood upon the edge of the channel and lifted her skinny hands high above her head. It seemed to us that she was making some sort of invocation to that place, and at the moment we were in no mood to witness a performance of that kind. The night breeze carried to our ears the howls of our pursuers, and as we watched the emaciated form of the old woman, a dim suspicion formed within our brains that she was either crazy or that she had lured us to the spot so that the Panther could surround us with his howling warriors.

"She's fooling us!" cried Templeton. "The old witch is humbugging us! What ——"

Red made a spring forward as he stopped speaking, but he was too late to grab the Mother of the Years. She had jumped straight out into the mud, landed at a point about four feet from the shore, but instead of disappearing bodily as we thought

she surely would, she only sank in the stuff till her knees were covered!

"She has struck bottom!" cried Morgan.

The hag turned herself carefully and started to chatter to Nao, and the Golden One passed on the remarks to Red.

"She says that there are ten steps between here and that black rock," explained Templeton. "They are the length of a short spear from each other, and if we miss them we will sink in that mud, which is deeper than the tallest tapang tree."

"And what awaits us at that black rock?" asked Chico.

"The Passage of the Glow-worms starts from that point. It leads from there under the rest of the channel to the island."

Morgan whistled in astonishment as the hag turned her face from us and looked steadily at the mud in front of her as if her keen black eyes were attempting to discover that second step hidden beneath two feet of thick mud. It was an eerie business. If she missed that second step and went down into that buttery mass it was a certainty that none of us would have the heart to make a second test. She had informed us that the passage had not been used for half a century, and we were fearful lest those steps had been swept away during the years.

"Keep your eye on the spot where she is standing!" cried Templeton. "The steps must be small by the cautious way she goes about it. You'll go next, Morgan, so watch where she springs from."

Chico moved to the bank and we watched the hag with breathless interest. For a full minute she stared at the mud in front of her, then she sprang.

"She's hit it!" cried Red. "Now, Morgan! Do you think you can jump? I'd go in front, but I want to guard the rear with the sword in case the beggars discover us before we're in the passage."

"I can jump it," muttered Chico. "Here goes!"

Chico sprang, hit the mud with a splash, sank to his knees, and stood upright.

We were breathing hard just then. If the Mother of the Years found a step missing at the other end of the submerged route we wondered if we could find our way back over that trail. It seemed the craziest gamble that we had ever taken, but it was our only chance at that moment.

The hag hopped to number three and landed safely, and Nao took Chico's place. Our nerves were on a tension just then. The Golden One was praying softly, and we were pleased that she was praying. We had a firm conviction that we wanted all the protection that prayers could bring at that minute.

"Now, Gung!" cried Templeton. "Don't take your eyes from the spot where the girl is standing, and spring for it the moment she jumps to the next."

That Hindu was shivering like a Tamil with the ague, but he moved to the edge of the morass as Red directed him to. The Mother of the Years made another leap, and when Chico and Nao moved along, Gung offered his spirit to Buddha and made the spring. He landed with a mighty splash, slipped upon the step, recovered himself, and stood upright.

"Good boy!" said Templeton. "Keep your eyes to the front and watch your next landing-place. Now, Lenford!

A yell came from the jungle as the old woman landed on step number five, and I was a bit reckless as I moved to the edge of the morass and jumped. The mud might be as deep as the Golden Well of Tingeran, but a worse fate was behind us. If we met death in the morass we would at least go to our graves in one piece, while the Panther would hack us up in a manner that was not nice to contemplate.

It was a curious sensation that clutched me when my feet hit the mud. A horrible fear that I had miscalculated the distance gripped me as I sank. A cold perspiration came out upon my body, and I



was on the point of crying out in terror when my feet struck a flat stone and I stood upright. I had successfully covered one tenth of the journey.

"Can you jump and carry the sword?" I cried back to Templeton.

"Sure," he answered. "Keep your eyes in front of you and don't worry about me."

Gung sprang to number three as the line moved ahead, and I landed squarely upon the spot he had left. Fear for my own life left me at that moment. A horrible dread lest Templeton, carrying the sword, should miss his footing, came upon me, and it required a great effort on my part to keep my eyes upon the figure of Gung immediately in front of me.

"Are you all right?" I asked, as I heard Red splash heavily in the slime.

"I'm all right," he answered. "Don't speak too loud, the brutes are close to us."

Out of the night came a howl that told us that the horde was on our trail, and Gung had hardly left the perch in front of me when I sprang for it. The deadly blowpipes were in our minds at that moment, and the fact that we would have our backs turned to the sharpshooters made the thought of acting as targets more unpleasant.

"Don't get excited!" said Templeton. "Take it easy! The old lady is on number seven."

"I wish I was there," I breathed. "This frog game is too slow when that crowd is behind us."

Gung took another hop and I followed him. So far there were no steps missing. Nao's prayers came back to us as she breathed them softly into the night, while the Hindu uttered a strange little invocation each time he found the stone step under his sinking feet. I guess that Gung was telling Buddha he would never leave Banjermassin for the rest of his life if he got back safe from the trip.

Fear for the sword made my hair prickle every time Templeton took a leap in the rear, and I knew that Chico was crazy with anxiety about the blade as he hopped away in front of us.

I struck number six and Red gave a big sigh of relief. "The old woman is on number ten," he breathed. "There are no breaks in the path. Glory be! we'll beat them yet!"

Slowly, carefully, one after the other, we hopped from one stone to the other as we made for the black rock. Once Gung nearly broke the chain. His feet slipped upon the eighth rock as he landed upon it, and his yell of fear went into the night.

"That will bring them on us now!" cried Templeton. "Hop along, you idiot! You'll get a dart in your back if you unloose another yell like that."

Gung took number nine like a toad on the home-stretch, and I followed on his heels. A cry came from the shore, and Chico, standing on the rock, urged us to make speed.

"They're coming!" he whispered. "Quick, Red! Quick!"

Templeton nearly landed on top of me as I sprang upon the black rock, and we rushed madly forward to the spot where the hag was standing.

"Where is the passage?" cried Chico. "Where did she go?"

The Mother of the Years had slipped into an opening about four feet wide in the side of the rock, and we rushed in without pausing to investigate. The moonlight had shown us the headhunters upon the very path down which we had followed the ancient female to the sea of mud, and we had no desire to make a close examination of any spot that offered us a haven from the poisoned darts.

"We must keep together," cried Red. "Look out! There's a light in front! What the mischief is it?"

Chico stopped, then he stumbled forward with a laugh of relief.

"Glow-worms," he answered. "This is the passage — the Passage of the Glow-worms!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE BLACK CURTAIN

IT WAS a strange sight that we saw in that passage. The stalactites hanging from the roof of the place were covered with glow-worms, and the faint blue glimmer startled us as we followed in the footsteps of the hag. There were millions of the insects. The dampness of the tunnel attracted them, and as the Mother of the Years had informed Nao that the passage had been named more than a half a century before, we understood that it had been a camping place for the insects for many years.

“Ask her where the opening at the other end will land us,” said Morgan. “This is a witch chamber!”

Templeton put Chico's question to Nao, and while the hag stopped to make an explanation to the Golden One, we managed to manufacture a crude torch by setting fire to the bark-cloth bandages soaked in fat which Nao had bound around Morgan after his battle with the Spotted Panther.

“She says that the passage will bring us out close

to the place of the swinging ropes," translated Red. "We cannot dodge that spot. We must pass by it in order to find the path that will lead us across the Million Mouths of Boorsh."

"They'll have a chance of getting us there," I said.

"The ropes are cut," said Templeton.

"But the blowpipes," growled Morgan. "The channel is narrow, and there will be little protection for us."

"We must try and dodge them," said Templeton cheerfully. "Luck has been with us up to the present, and I believe it will stay. They know nothing about this passage and they will never expect us to come out at that point."

The hag's bare feet were pattering on ahead of us, and we slipped and stumbled after her across the rocky floor of the passage that was wet with the moisture that soaked in from the buttery mud that completely covered the rock in whose hollowed-out interior we were running. The glow-worms were the greatest wonder of that place. They covered the stalactites in such quantities that the hanging pieces of rock resembled great masses of glimmering light.

We had strange notions regarding that passage — notions probably arising from want of food and

sleep — and as I listened to the patter of the feet of the Mother of the Years, I thought that we would be compelled to carry the Great Parong of Buddha through that slimy passage for all eternity. The echoes sprang up and raced away in front of us — raced away down the weird tunnel which the glow-worms faintly illuminated.

On and on we ran. The light of the torch flung strange shadows in front of us, lighting up the roof of the place, from which hung the stalactites. The place was a nightmare. As we ran we pictured the great morass above our heads, separated only by a layer of rock the thinness of which was evident by the moisture which seeped into the passage.

“It is an infernal place,” growled Morgan.

Templeton nodded his head. “But we’re in luck,” he said. “If we hadn’t spoken to the old hag we would never have escaped from the *kampong*.”

The passage was not more than ten feet across at its widest point, and its height rarely exceeded eight feet. Here and there it narrowed so that as we stumbled along we could touch the rocky sides with our outstretched hands, while the roof came down so close that we ran in a crouching position. It was wonderful how nature had formed that strange tunnel beneath the mud.



"It reminds me of the New York subways," said Morgan, "only there are no trains."

"And the Panther is the third rail that we're scared of," growled Red.

In some places the peculiar formation of the tunnel did bring remembrances of the subways in Manhattan. Occasionally the torch lit up a section of the arched roof that seemed as if it had been chiselled by man.

The passage did not move directly forward, but wound about by a zigzag route, so that we were convinced that we would have to travel more than six times the actual distance which lay between the hidden steps and the place of the swinging ropes.

"We'll never get out of it," said Morgan, after we had been running for some time. "This infernal place runs into the bowels of the earth."

"We'll get out," said Templeton. "Keep running, man! Keep running!"

"But it seems without end," said Morgan. "We will — Suffering grasshoppers! what's up?"

Chico's exclamation was caused by the action of the hag. The Mother of the Years, who had been leading the procession, stopped suddenly. Templeton cannoned violently against her, and Morgan, the Golden One, and Gung collided with Red before they could pull up.

"What's wrong?" cried Morgan. "What's the matter with her?"

The Mother of the Years uttered a strange whine of fear, and Morgan grasped the torch and held it up high in an endeavour to find out the cause of her terror.

"Look!" cried Templeton. "*Look!*"

It was then that we saw the great black curtain that effectually barred our way. The thick mud from the morass was oozing slowly down through the roof, forming a shining black wall immediately in our path, and passing away through the floor of the tunnel into some underground pit of which we knew nothing.

The tunnel was completely blocked by this black curtain, upon which the light of the torch shone as we stared at it. It was a terrible sight. We understood that the strata had been disrupted in some way so that a crevice had formed in the roof and also in the floor of the tunnel through which the mud flowed, but whether that moving barrier was one foot or ten feet in thickness was the great problem that faced us at that moment.

"Good God!" cried Templeton. "We are cut off!"

As we stared in stupefied wonder at that spectacle our minds went back to the horde of savages that

we had seen charging down toward the hidden steps at the moment we entered the tunnel. We were in a trap. Our retreat was cut off, and the black barrier effectually prevented us from going forward.

Quietly, ever so quietly, the flowing mud passed before us. It was a moving curtain that rolled down before our eyes like an endless strip of black velvet. And the silence with which it flowed terrified us. It made no noise outside a slight gurgling that now and then came to our ears from the opening in the floor of the tunnel through which it disappeared.

The hag stood and spoke to Nao, and the Golden One, wide-eyed with terror and wonder, translated to Templeton.

"She says that it was never here before," growled Red, translating what Nao had told him. "She thinks it must have been done by an *dintu* to block our escape."

"I suppose this is the real reason why the tunnel has not been used," said Chico. "This probably happened fifty years ago and the hag has known nothing of it. We're trapped!"

We had no doubt about the hag's ignorance of that barrier. Her astonishment could not have been assumed. Her little black eyes expressed her terror as she raced up and down in front of the

obstacle. She was the most surprised one of the party, and her vanity was considerably hurt by the happening. She had promised us that she would lead us to the place of the swinging ropes, and now she had proved herself incapable of fulfilling her promises.

"We are done!" cried Morgan. "We might as well go back and take our chances with the mob."

For about five minutes we stood and stared at the obstruction that had come in our path. Gung was the only one who could not stand and look at it. Fear loosened the muscles of the Hindu's knees and he fell upon the floor and squirmed as he had done on the night when the orang-utan legion stampeded the Dyak carriers.

"Get up!" cried Templeton. "Get up, I say!"

But Gung could not get to his feet. He was a gibbering idiot, with eyes bulging with terror. He rolled around on the wet floor, chanting scraps of prayers to every saint in the Hindu calendar.

Templeton moved close to the curtain and thrust his arm into it. The tremendous weight of the falling mud bore upon his muscular forearm, but he held it steady, and thrust it forward till his shoulder was close the moving cataract. We watched him in silence. The thickness of the mud avalanche concerned us at that moment, but we

were not too hopeful regarding the chances which Red had of finding out the breadth by the test he applied.

"It is probably a couple of yards through to the other side," said Chico. "Perhaps the rest of the tunnel has been swept away. Ask the old woman how far does she think we are from the end of the passage, Red?"

Templeton, still with his hand thrust into the mud, put the question through Nao to the Mother of the Years and then translated her answer. "She says that we are quite close to the opening that will bring us above ground," he said.

"Well, I think the opening has been swept away," growled Morgan. "That is my opinion."

Templeton stepped back from the mud and looked at his arm. "I think it is just a thin curtain flowing through a crevice in the roof and in the floor," he said. "If I can judge by the pressure on my arm it is not more than eighteen inches thick."

Chico stepped forward without speaking, and he imitated Templeton by thrusting his bare arm into the curtain. For a moment he stood without speaking, then he stepped back and looked at Red.

"I believe you're right," he said. "I have a belief that the tunnel is continued on the other side of this barrier."

We were standing in a little circle looking helplessly at each other. The hag did not understand what Templeton and Chico had said, but when Nao explained, she brightened visibly, and again started to chatter furiously.

"How can we test it?" asked Morgan.

"There is only one way," said Red. "That is by one of us jumping through it."

He spoke quietly, but there was a strained note in his voice that made us understand that he fully realized the danger to the one making that test.

Chico Morgan stepped back eight or ten feet from the obstruction, and for a moment we did not realize what he intended to do. Then it dawned upon Templeton as he looked at that plucky boy pulling the Hindu out of his way so that he would have a clear run at the mud barrier in an endeavour to hurl himself through it on the possibility of the tunnel being continued on the other side.

"Stop!" cried Red. "Don't be foolish! Let us wait a moment! We might think out a way of testing the actual thickness."

"There is no way of testing it but by taking a chance," said Morgan quietly. "Don't stop me, Templeton! If I don't come back, you'll know that it is impassable."

Now as I write the story of Morgan's bravery, I



ponder over the cool manner in which he proposed to test the obstruction that blocked our path. There wasn't a sign of fear upon his face, and as I held the torch up high so that he could have a clear run, I noted the grim smile upon his clean-cut features. It was the old confident smile with which he had met the first rush of the Panther when the big brute sprang at him. Fear was a stranger to Chico Morgan, and in no moment did he show his tremendous courage so well as he did in that eerie Passage of the Glow-worms.

"Look out!" he cried. "I am going to settle the question!"

I opened my mouth to utter a final warning but I had no time to speak. Morgan took a flying rush, hit the curtain of mud with tremendous force and disappeared.

We experienced a horrid choking sensation as we stared at the place where we had last seen Chico. It seemed as if he had been suddenly blotted out of our lives. The black curtain rolled on with the same slow movement that had held us spellbound when we first saw it, and our imaginations pictured Chico being borne into some great subterranean cavern by the weight of the falling mud. We were stupefied. We were unable to move or think. Our throats became dry and parched, and in my

own case, I know that I could not have uttered a word if my life had depended upon it. That moving barrier was death itself, and I wondered dully how we could have stood by and watched Chico commit an act that we were certain had led him to his death.

For fully two minutes we stood and stared at that wall of mud, but those two minutes appeared to be centuries. The Mother of the Years was making a curious gurgling noise, while Gung still squirming on the floor, stared at the obstacle with bulging eyes.

But it was the expression of terror upon the face of the Golden One that held me that moment. Fear had sprung upon her and clutched her in its grip. She seemed as if she had been turned to stone the moment that Morgan had disappeared from view.

"Mother o' me!" cried Templeton. "Mother o' ——"

Red's exclamation was interrupted by a happening which set our hearts pounding madly. The curtain of mud was disturbed by a ball of filth-covered humanity that came hurtling through, and Chico stumbled over the squirming Gung and fell upon the floor of the tunnel. He had come back to us!

We fell upon him, wiping the mud from his face, the Golden One and the Mother of Years lending a hand in the work. Nao tore a piece from her

wonderful *sarong* and in a moment the spluttering Chico was able to breathe. Then we sat him up and waited till he could speak, while the Golden One held his hands and watched him with eyes that were filled with moisture.

"What is the answer?" asked Templeton. "Tell us! Quick!"

Chico put his big hands over the little hand of Nao and patted it softly. "We are safe!" he cried. "We are safe!"

"How thick is it?" questioned Templeton.

"Not more than eighteen inches," answered Morgan. "The tunnel is continued on the other side, and twenty yards farther on is the opening of which the Mother of the Years has told us."

We thrilled as we listened to Chico's story. Once again fate had been kind to us and had given us a chance to escape from a position that looked hopeless. A moment before Chico's return we were without hope, but our hearts swelled as we grasped the fact that victory was on our side. Once through the tunnel the only danger that was in our way was the guard that might be on duty near the place of the swinging ropes, which we would have to pass in order to reach the track across the stretch of the ulcerlike Mouths of Boorsh, through which we had wound our way with Nao two nights before.

Morgan got upon his feet, and still holding Nao's hand, looked at Templeton. "We must jump through it," he said quietly. "And the weight of the mud makes it advisable that we should help the women. How would it be for you to hold the hand of the hag while I jump with the Golden One?"

Templeton looked at the Mother of the Years as if he received Chico's proposition with some disfavour, but with a grim smile upon his face he explained the matter to Nao so that she could translate to the old woman.

"Gung and Lenford can jump by themselves," continued Morgan. "Go on, Templeton, get ready. Jump straight through with all the strength you can put into your limbs."

Nao explained the matter to the hag, and the old woman walked up quietly and put her skinny claw in Templeton's big hand.

"Now for it," said Red. "Mrs. Methuselah and I will lead the dance."

The big Englishman and the old crone walked back a few yards and then rushed forward at the mud barrier. At any other moment the sight of that crone running beside the tall Britisher would have been ludicrous, but at that moment our mirth was chilled by the strange obstacle that barred our path to liberty. Fear choked our laughter, and

we watched with bulging eyes the big man and the old woman strike the barrier. They disappeared as Chico had done, while the curtain of mud moved on as if it had not been disturbed by their assault upon it.

For about two minutes we stood and stared at it, then Morgan took Gung by the shoulders, shook him gently, and explained the task that was before him. The Hindu was shivering with fear. For the moment when he had been pushed up to us on the slope above the *kampong* he was in a condition of complete collapse, and now that he had come face to face with another terrifying obstacle, he had broken down completely.

"Gung," said Chico, gripping him by the thin shoulders, "you must rush at the curtain and spring clean through it. You'll do it. It is an easy matter. Come back here and take a good run at it. Don't be afraid. Templeton and the hag are on the other side."

He dragged Gung back to a distance of about ten paces from the curtain of mud, turned the Hindu's face toward the barrier, and gave him a push to send him on his way.

Gung gave a howl of fear, charged madly along the uneven floor of the tunnel, and sprang at the mud wall. I have a vivid picture on my mental tablets of the way in which that Hindu disappeared. Chico, holding the torch, flung the light upon the curtain

of mud, and the Hindu struck it with legs and arms outstretched.

"He looked like an old woman jumping over a fence," said Chico. "Go on, Lenford!"

I confess that I was as terrified as Gung as I faced the obstacle, but there was no possibility of evading that jump. I took a short run and sprang wildly at the barrier, struck the moving curtain, and for a moment had a horrible sensation that I was being sucked down by the avalanche. The mud was suffocating. The buttery mass seemed to grip one like a great wet hand, but before the downward suction could pull me below the floor of the tunnel, I had broken through on the other side, and fell full length upon the floor. Templeton and the hag lifted me to my feet, and before I had wiped the mud from my face, Morgan and the Golden One were beside us. We had no torch then, and we could not see each other.

"Are you right?" asked Templeton.

"I'm right," said Chico. "Where's Lenford?"

"I am here," I answered.

"Come on then," ordered Chico. "Do you see the entrance? It's only twenty yards away."

"Where's Gung?" asked Templeton.

No answer came to the query, and a cold chill gripped us.



"Gung!" cried Morgan; "Gung, where the devil are you? *Gung!*"

There was no answer to the cry. For a minute we stood in the darkness without speaking, then Templeton broke the silence.

"Did he jump?" he asked.

"He took the jump before Lenford," answered Morgan.

"Well, he is gone," said the Englishman quietly. "He didn't come through. He has been sucked below the floor."

Morgan foraged in his pockets, found a dry match, and scratched it against the wall of the tunnel. The light flared up, but there was no sign of Gung. The mud curtain was slowly unrolling itself like an endless strip of black cloth, and we shivered as we looked at it. It was plain to us what had happened. The Hindu, in his weak state, had been sucked down by the tremendous weight of the falling mud, and with a feeling of horror we five stepped back from the barrier which we had successfully overcome.

"There is no way of helping him," said Morgan, "and we must go on. Come along; the opening is in front. I'm sorry, but we must save ourselves." And with a sick feeling at our hearts, we turned from the black curtain and rushed forward.

## CHAPTER XXII

### HOW THE PANTHER CAME BACK

THE opening of the tunnel showed up before us like a bright silver dollar as we rounded the turn in the passage after leaving the mud barrier.

"Here it is," said Morgan. "We're right now. Give me a turn at carrying the sword, Templeton; I'm feeling splendid."

Red turned over the Great Parong to Chico as we raced up the little slope toward the spot where we saw the welcome moonbeams. It was long after midnight as we neared the round opening, and the stillness of the outside world seemed to impress us curiously as we crawled out upon the rocky island. The channel was barely thirty feet wide at this point, and the mangrove-covered shoreline on the *kampong* side was quite distinct in the moonlight. But we knew from the landmarks that we were quite some distance from the spot where the sleepless guardian had received us on the night we swung across the channel.

There were no signs of the Spotted Panther's band, and with a feeling that we might pass the danger point without being seen, we ran forward at our best speed, taking full advantage of the shelter which the scattered boulders afforded us. We were between two evils at that moment. On our left as we ran stretched the Mouths of Boorsh, unfordable at that point because the Dyaks had discovered no path through the many shivering mouths, while on our right the channel of bubbling mud separated us from the jungle that lay close to the *kampong*.

It was at this point in the flight that the pace seemed to tell on the Golden One. The wild run through the night had tired her, and as we neared the place where the ropes had been suspended across the channel, she dropped to the tail end of the procession. Chico, carrying the Great Sword, was running immediately in front of her, while Templeton and I were trotting behind the old woman, who covered ground with a tireless lope that astonished us. That old hag was a wonderful advertisement for the simple life. She could outrun a wolf with those skinny legs that one would never associate with speed or endurance.

The Mother of the Years pointed ahead, and we understood that we were close to the narrow neck

of the channel, where the followers of the Panther would probably be on guard. But we were forced to run the blockade. Our only hope lay in slipping quietly by this danger point and hurrying across the Mouths of Boorsh by the path which the Golden One had led us over two nights before. Any delay was abhorrent to us just then. Luck had been with us on that strange journey, and as we stumbled toward the point where One-Who-Never-Slept had collapsed when Templeton had proved himself such a skilful marksman, we felt certain that we would get by in safety. We thought that nothing could stop us from carrying away the Great Parong. We thought that the weapon, like the magic blade with which Attila the Hun crimsoned the plains of Europe, could never be taken from a man who wielded it well, and none could swing that blade like Chico Morgan and Red Templeton.

The old woman glanced at Red inquiringly as we turned a corner, but the big Englishman waved her on.

"Never mind them!" he cried, forgetting in his excitement that she could not speak English. "Go straight ahead and let them scream! We're on the home track and we don't care for a million of them."

The hag dashed around a big boulder in the

direction of the baked surface of the morass, and we wasted no time in following her. The landing place where the watcher had guarded the swinging ropes was nearly opposite, and we were anxious to gain the shelter of the rocks behind which Templeton and I had crouched when Nao had given the signal to One-Who-Never-Slept. If we reached those rocks we would be safe. The track across the gurgling quagmire would be immediately in front of us, and we would be well on our way to the Barito before the Panther and his followers had discovered the hidden stepping-stones by which we had made our way to the Passage of the Glow-worms.

The old woman dashed across the open space opposite the big tapang tree from which the rope had been swinging, and Red Templeton followed her into safety behind the rocks. Morgan and I raced swiftly on their heels, but while Chico and Nao were still upon the bare, moon-washed ridge of stone that was worn smooth with the countless feet of the savages who had swung backward and forward across the channel, a yell came from the other side of the river of mud, and we knew that our retreat was discovered.

The yell had a peculiar, paralyzing effect upon me. I tried to keep my face turned toward the

morass, but the tremendous scream of rage compelled me to turn my head and look toward the shore. Rushing down the slope, up which we had climbed after disposing of the body of the sleepless one, came the Spotted Panther!

I have a dim recollection that Morgan halted as if he was hypnotized by the sight of that charging savage. And I know that the Golden One turned and watched him. The knowledge that the ropes were cut made us intensely curious to know what the savage would do when he reached the leaping-off stone upon the bank. The picture comes back to me vividly as I write. I can see now upon the film of my mind the mighty form of the Panther, and I remember that I noticed, as he dashed down the slope, the moonbeams flashing upon the Great Parong of Buddha that Morgan carried. Chico was between me and the channel of mud, and nearer still to the dividing gulf of bubbling slime was the Golden One, who had lagged behind from the moment we left the Passage of the Glow-worms.

No one spoke as the Dyak chieftain dashed down the bank. A silence followed the yell — a curious silence as if we sensed an impending tragedy. The speed with which the brown giant was racing down the hill made us wonder stupidly regarding his inten-



tions, and we guessed blindly as to what he intended to do.

The Panther reached the edge of the channel, and Red Templeton gave a cry of surprise. I think Chico and I echoed that cry. The sight appalled us. The big brown man crouched as he reached the edge, then, gathering himself together, he hurled himself across the channel of mud!

I do not think that any athlete since time began ever made a leap equal to the one the Spotted Panther made that night on the shores of the Mouths of Boorsh. I am certain that no one ever equalled that great jump. The Rajputs tell of a Mongol chief who sprang across a great chasm in the Karakoram Hills, but I'll wager that chasm was not as wide as the river of slime across which the chief of the Orang Bukkit hurled his great body. He rose from the rock like a winged thing, swept over the bubbling depths, and landed on our side of the channel with a full three feet to spare!

It was Red Templeton who first recovered the use of his wits. The sight of that brute hurtling through the air had paralyzed our thought centres, and it was only when Templeton gave a cry of warning that we recognized the danger. The Golden One, being at the tail end of the procession, was the closest of our party to the Panther, and as he rushed

toward her, we realized that Morgan could not reach the side of the girl in time to save her from the kris that flashed in the hand of the gigantic savage.

Chico Morgan realized the impending calamity at the moment that Templeton cried out his warning. Morgan's revolver was empty, and death was springing toward Nao with mighty leaps. The girl was so stunned that she was unable to run from the attacking giant. The silvery whiteness of the Panther's face struck terror into her heart, and her limbs lacked the strength to carry her toward Chico so that he would have an opportunity of obstructing the murderous rush of the savage.

It was then that Morgan acted. He swung the Great Parong of Buddha around his head till it made a halo of silver light as the moonbeams kissed its shining blade, then he loosened his grip and sent the Great Sword flying through the air at the leaping Panther!

I shall see the picture of that flying blade in my dreams for all time. It haunts me. I wake in the night gripped by that same agony that held me at that moment. I shall dream of the incident till I die. The Great Sword, released from Chico's grip, drove toward the Panther like a spear of light. And the big savage seemed to sense death in its approach. He gave a cry of fear that was shut off

abruptly as the point struck him in the breast with terrific force, and he staggered backward. Templeton sprang forward, but Red was too late. The edge of the river of mud was close to the Panther when the blade struck, and the force with which Chico hurled the weapon drove him over the brink. When we reached the side of the channel of black slime there was not even an air bubble to denote the spot where the Spotted Panther had disappeared with the Great Parong of Buddha driven deep into his broad chest!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### LOVE RULES THE WORLD

**I**T WAS the voice of the Mother of the Years that roused us from the stupor that fell upon us when the wonderful sword disappeared from our sight. Something seemed to have snapped in our brains when we saw the Spotted Panther reel backward, and we were oblivious to all danger as we stared at the black mud. We had thrown ourselves full length upon the smooth rock, and we stared in wide-eyed horror at the mud that swirled around in curious eddies that had a snaky appearance in the moonlight.

The hag was calling one word into the silent night, and that word brought a group of the Panther's warriors to the other side of the channel. And the meaning of her chant became plain to us as she repeated it over and over again. She had used the same word in speaking of Gung when he had been brought forward as a sacrifice, and we understood in a vague way that she was shrieking out the news that we had chosen the Panther as a sacrifice in the

ceremony connected with the closing of the Mouths of Boorsh. And we understood more. As we glanced at her skinny arms that flailed the night air that was filled with all the strange odours of the East, we knew that she was asking the awestruck group upon the other side of the channel to be patient as the great quagmire would become solid ground the moment the sacrifice was accepted.

Red Templeton gripped my shoulder and shook me till my scattered wits returned. Chico Morgan was standing beside Red, his arm supporting the Golden One, and their eyes were fixed upon the Mother of the Years, whose shrill shouts went out like red-hot wires into the stillness that seemed to come upon that place the moment the Panther disappeared.

"We had better get away before they lose their temper," said Red speaking in a strange, quiet tone. "They are liable to hurt somebody if a miracle doesn't happen around here within the next few hours."

"But the sword?" I gurgled. "Couldn't we — couldn't we try —"

"Nao says the channel is deeper than the big tapang tree in the clearing," interrupted Templeton. "We cannot recover it. We'll leave the old woman to soothe them while we sneak away quietly."

I shall always remember the journey across the morass where the green-edged mouths quivered as we came close to them. And of one incident in that walk I have a particularly vivid recollection. Halfway across that place of terror I walked so close to one of those quivering mouths that the thing managed to throw over me a peculiar fascination so that I was unable to turn away from it. I tried to cry out to Templeton, but my tongue refused to utter the words. And the green mouth slobbered as my footsteps shook the flaky crust that surrounded the aperture. I had a belief that it was laughing jovially at the fact that its weird power was dragging me toward it.

It was Chico who saved me from the green-lipped ulcer. He came swiftly behind me and dragged me back from the very edge of the thing.

"Shake yourself together, Lenford," he said, when he had dragged me to a safe place. "Forget the sword, boy. We have a long way to go before we get to Banjermassin."

But I could not forget the Great Parong. Those shivering mouths appeared to mock our failure as we followed Nao along the path that twisted like a serpent between their greedy lips. And the gurgling noises struck terror into our hearts. The place was vicious. Those ulcerlike openings were possessed



of a strange hypnotic power that terrified us. I think that the stoical Morgan and the stolid Englishman felt that power before we reached solid ground. When the fringe of the jungle came toward us as we neared the place where we had lain and watched the two pigs go down in that morass, we four, Templeton, Morgan, Nao, and I, started to run, and despite Nao's protests that we were endangering our lives by moving at any speed over the caked surface, we could not control our legs. The fear sprang upon us at that moment. The terror of that place, which had been growing since the night we crossed it, broke out of bounds now that our thoughts had been withdrawn from the Great Parong, and we were crazy men.

The Golden One called out to Templeton, but we refused to obey Red's order when he translated her message.

"Stop!" he cried. "She says that we'll break the crust! Stop! We'll all go down if we're not careful!"

But we could not stop. Gibbering terror was at our heels and we could not control our legs. I had the belief that the mouths were reaching out to each other to engulf us, and every now and then I would spring wildly into the air as my imagination fooled me into the belief that new mouths were forming beneath our feet.

Even Templeton ran after he had screamed the warning of the Golden One. Our flight became a mad stampede in which caution was thrown to the winds. The solid ground loomed up in front of us, and we had not sufficient control over ourselves to cover the intervening distance at a safe gait.

I passed Templeton in that wild race. I outstripped Chico, who was running by the side of the Golden One. The shore reached out to us and we could not stop. There was safety beneath the silent trees of mohor and sandalwood that stood upon the solid ground and watched us as we raced madly toward the shore, our souls flayed with the ten-thonged whip of fear that our imaginations laid upon us.

I heard the Golden One give a scream of fear, but I didn't look back. I couldn't. The shore was only a few feet away, and I flung myself forward. And even then the terror did not leave me. I crashed through the vines and ran on till I had placed fifty yards between myself and the morass. Then I flung myself on the grass and waited. I had proved myself a coward in the face of the uncanny mouths that slobbered as we rushed by.

Chico Morgan, with the Golden One upon his shoulders, staggered on to the little clearing where I was resting my fear-stricken limbs, and as I

glanced up at the girl I understood the reason for the scream of terror which I had heard as I reached the bank. As Chico laid her down upon the grass she reached out and attempted to kiss his hands.

"Don't! Please don't!" cried Chico. "Keep a stiff upper lip and we'll pull through."

"Did she — did she slip into one?" I asked.

"Nearly," answered Morgan. "We managed to catch her by throwing ourselves full length upon the crust." Then he lifted the girl upon her feet, and with Red and me following, ran forward on the path that led to the cross.

It was some time in the forenoon when we reached the stone cross in the jungle, and it was only then that I managed to shake myself free from the stupor which had fallen upon me when the Great Parong disappeared in the channel of mud. I came to my senses when Nao asked me by signs to kneel beside Red Templeton and Morgan, and I promptly obeyed her command. I didn't pray, but I listened while the Golden One made the same soft little prayer that she had sent into the still air on the morning we met her there. I know that Chico Morgan prayed, and so did Templeton. I saw the latter while still upon his knees take from his bosom the little miniature of Evelyn Courtney which he had gazed at on the morning when the man-hound was

hot upon our trail as we lay in the cave above the *kampong*. And it was then that I realized that there was something in the world greater than riches. Templeton had forgotten his disappointment as he thought over the one who waited for him in Banjermassin, and Chico Morgan was returning thanks for the strength which had enabled him to send the Great Parong of Buddha into the breast of the Panther when he was leaping forward to kill the one he loved. Great is love. I realized as I knelt and watched the two men, who were as courageous as lions, the truth which the Persian poet sang:

“The rose tree and the lotus bloom  
Because we love each other so,  
The light from your eyes makes the stars  
That swing high in the heaven’s glow,  
And ’tis the love of such as we  
That makes the seasons come and go.”

It was four weeks after the morning when we knelt at the little stone cross in the jungle that we reached Banjermassin. Evelyn Courtney was waiting for us in the bungalow within the Dream Garden, and as she escorted us into the room where Red had shown us the Chalice of Everlasting Fire we found Courtney sleeping off an opium debauch on the couch he had occupied when Gung told us the wonder story of the

treasure stolen by Enrique de Gama and carried up into the dark hills by the Orang Bukkit.

Courtney roused himself when he heard us talking and, recognizing Templeton, he gave a maniacal laugh and sat upright.

"Did you — did you get anything?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Red.

"Treasure?" gasped Courtney.

"Yes, treasure," said Templeton quietly, and he pointed to the Golden One, who was holding the hand of Evelyn Courtney as they sat in the window seat, side by side.

"But the sword?" cried the opium smoker.

"We missed the sword," said Red, without showing the slightest regret in his voice. "It was not decreed that we should get the sword."

Very briefly he told of our trip, and when he had finished, the opium smoker laughed loudly and made horrible grimaces.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he cried. "The things are cursed, Templeton! The Chalice — the Chalice of Everlasting Fire is gone!

"Gone?" said Templeton.

"Gone!" shrilled the opium fiend. "The Chinamen at the opium joint stole it from me. Evelyn's fault — all Evelyn's fault! She wouldn't give me the money for the black smoke, so — I took the chalice.



And the devils stole it while I slept, and they've cleared out with it. The things are cursed, Templeton. You are lucky. Lucky! You got your stake back after you laid it on the gambling table! Your stake — your life, man! Your life!"

The maniac burst into another fit of laughter and flung himself on the couch, and Red Templeton took the hand of Evelyn Courtney, who had walked to his side.

"He's right," she said in a soft whisper that I overheard as I crept away. "You might have lost your life, and all the treasure in the world would have mattered little."

Chico Morgan and the Golden One were sitting in a dim nook in the hall as I passed out upon the piazza, and, with a curious feeling of contentment stealing over me, I sat down to breathe the little vagrant puffs of air that came from the river. The East seemed very, very old to me as I sat there. Scents of musk and marigolds, of incense and jasmine, of wet earth and rotting vegetation stirred strange thoughts within my brain. And I wondered stupidly concerning the trick of fate by which the Great Parong had been snatched from our hands. I pondered long over the matter. The winds told of many things, of dark and wicked deeds, of shameful acts which the march of civilization had stamped



out. And the Great Sword was connected with those acts which the strong hand of the white man had made impossible. Then, out of my meditation, came a feeling of gladness, a feeling of great joy. The Power that rules the world had prevented us from bringing the sword from its dark retreat. The big blade might have caused rivers of blood to flow through the East, and, as the minutes passed by, I became convinced that everything had happened for the best.

And as I sat there feeling that the death of the Panther had been planned by the Hand which guides the universe, I heard the soft, liquid voice of Nao speaking within the hall. And I knew that our trip had not been in vain. The soul of a girl who was as lovely as the dawn had been fighting for spiritual life in that lonely *kampong* by the Million Mouths of Boorsh, and I knew that Red Templeton, Chico Morgan, and I had done our part. Providence had a mission for us three, and, in a blind way, led on by the lust for gold, we had worked out His holy will.

THE END



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